

# Introducing the new medium

I LIKE IT WHEN  
YOU SLEEP,  
FOR YOU ARE SO  
BEAUTIFUL YET  
SO UNAWARE OF IT.

A pretty  
face doesn't  
mean a  
pretty heart

WE SEE  
WHAT  
WE  
WANT

BLACK  
IS THE  
NEW  
BLACK

MY HEAD IS  
A VERY  
DARK  
PLACE

IF HE PUTS HIS  
HANDS ON YOU,  
CUT THEM OFF.

GOOD LIFE

orphan\_account

## Eighty-eight

“*Aquamendi!*” a young male voice yelled from across the courtyard.

Severus' head immediately snapped around to find the one who had uttered the spell. But, too late, the young Slytherin was slapped square in the back with a cold jet of water that sprayed up under his hair and leaked down the back of his robe to drip on the cobbled walkway beneath his feet. For a moment, a look of pallid surprise shook the boy's face before being forced to shut down into a cold blank expression.

*‘I’m already in my sixth year. I’m used to this. I’ll light myself on fire before I let them get any satisfaction out of seeing me flinch,’* Severus seethed to himself.

From behind him, Severus could hear the howling laughter of more than just a few people.

*‘I won’t let them have the satisfaction of seeing a reaction,’* Severus coached himself, as he slowly let out the breath that he hadn’t realized he was holding.

He slowly put one foot in front of the other, hoping to walk calmly away before his tormentors recovered from their fits of hysterical laughter.

“Aw! Sorry, Snivellus!” a familiar voice called from among crows of cruel laughing. Severus hardened his expression and kept walking. “I was just practicing and caught you a bit there. You can send your cleaning bill to me,” Sirius Black finished, barely getting the last words out before a bout of debilitating laughter overcame him.

“Cleaning bill?” another familiar voice asked incredulously. “If you even tried to put that tattered rag through the wash, it would just fall to pieces. Blimey, I’m amazed the touch of water didn’t disintegrate the whole thing on the spot,” James Potter went on, much to the raucous amusement of his peers.

Severus did his best not to listen and to keep his feet moving at a steady pace, even if his twisted nauseous stomach begged him to shoot out of there as quickly as he could. He cursed his ears as he rounded a corner and still managed to catch every last word of James Potter’s joke, before the sound of laughter engulfed everything. Severus swallowed the knot in his throat. He just wasn’t up to dealing with Potter. Not that day.

“Ah...!” a feminine gasp sounded from in front of him.

Looking up, Severus noticed Lily Evans with two other useless Gryffindor girls by her side. His eyes took her in completely, drunk in her visage like a desperately dehydrated man lost in the Sahara. Her flowing bright red hair, pale cream colored skin, and outstanding, shining, green eyes. As he looked at her he saw the familiar look of pity and anger wash over her face, only to be quickly covered by a mask of disinterest in the next instant.

Severus felt his blood leap into his cheeks at the sight of her sudden change. He didn’t even try to apologize for the wrongdoing that brought such a cruel expression to her face, as the girl he had once called ‘mudblood’ brushed past him.

Severus just kept going.

“James!” he heard Lily shout fondly, as he climbed a few steps and pulled open a heavy door to quickly get inside.

He cursed under his breath, damning his own exceptional sense of hearing.

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Severus wearily wrung the last few drops of water out of his robe. It was an old robe. His mother had gotten it from a thrift store, or an old friend, or something. The style wasn't anything like what the other students were wearing. There were large holes that he had patched himself (often with discolored thread or a piece of leftover cloth). It never bothered him, personally. He never cared much what he looked like. He still didn't think it mattered and often persisted in wearing the worst of his robes regularly, just to prove a point.

But, on that particular day, Severus had worn one of his best robes (it only had three holes in it and they weren't even that big). He had cleaned his hair early that morning and brushed it this way and that to try and make it look less greasy (but the brushing just seemed to make it shinier). He had kept his head down and had even taken different routes to class, hoping that he wouldn't meet up with anybody too foul. Perhaps he had tried too hard and had heightened their interests, because it obviously didn't work.

Just that one day, Severus had wanted to be left alone. And, just that one day, he had been 'accidentally spelled' three times. That was two more than usual and it wasn't even dinner time yet.

Severus sighed heavily and leaned against the cool tiles of the bathroom wall. The tiles were cold against his back, the chill quickly bleeding through his threadbare t-shirt.

"Crying in the boy's room is a bad habit, Snivellus," James Potter snorted from the doorway.

Severus opened his eyes slowly, thinking that he must have done something in a past life to deserve such a cruel divine punishment as James Potter's attention.

James laughed softly and unfolded his arms from across his chest as he crossed the moss encrusted tiles towards his classmate.

"Man, Lily used to hate you, but now I don't think she even sees you anymore, you know?" James was saying. "She usually scolds me at least a little for picking on you, so I try not to do it in front of her. But, today you were so pathetic, I couldn't help myself. And, she didn't say a word! Almost like she didn't even see you!" James finished, laughing with his mouth, even if his hazel eyes were fixed and cold.

Severus didn't say anything. His day was bad, and he had expected it to get worse. His expectations were correct.

"Hey," James said huskily, putting his hands against the tiles on either side of Severus' head and leaning in close, so that the smaller boy could smell the faint aroma of cherries on his breath. "You really love her, right?"

Severus closed his eyes. '*Any day, but today...*' he was thinking over and over.

James' lips brushed against the shell of his ear. He said, "How many times, already? Eighty-seven?" so softly that even someone with their ear a foot away wouldn't have heard. "That's six more until she's yours."

James' lips drifted over Severus' brow and made movements as soft as a moth's wings against the thin skin of his closed eyelids. "A promise is a promise, after all. Not that I think she'd have you, after your little outburst last year. You should just give it up."

*'Anything to get your dirty paws off her,'* Severus thought with venom, as James' lip came down to brush against the tips of his eye lashes.

James pulled back a bit, looking at Severus with the same expression he might if Sirius didn't get one of his jokes.

"What's wrong with you today? No snappy come backs at all?" James asked, sounding disappointed.

"Would you just get on with it, you insufferable twat," Severus spat out, hoping a little venom would shut James Potter's endlessly moving mouth.

Unbelievable as it was, it did just that. The surprised look on James Potter's face stretched into a satisfied and hungry grin as he looked down at Severus. The Slytherin's look of disdain never wavered for a moment.

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Severus' breath came in pained hitched gasps as James' Potter thrusted inside of him again and again. For the eighty-eighth time, James was fucking him hard. As per usual, he was also taking a stupidly long time to finish. So far, Severus had found no way to get around this pointed failing in his manner of intercourse, with the exception of trying to last as long as the Gryffindor (because, dealing with James' enthusiastic penetration after flaccid was not something he particularly enjoyed).

The young Slytherin's arms were trembling at the elbows, where he was braced against the lid of the toilet they were rutting on. His stomach muscles were twitching as well and sweat ran down his flushed face and dripped from his jaw onto his chest. His robe was lying somewhere out in the main area of the washroom, where it had been thrown by his partner, along with his tie. His shirt was still hanging on around his wrists, while his pants, socks, and shoes, had been left on the floor around James' feet.

There were only a few things that James Potter demanded about sex. The only real rule of their engagement was that James was always on top. But, he often insisted on Severus completely (or, at least, almost completely) disrobing. He was also rather pugnacious about making Severus face him during the act, as well.

Severus found these demands exceedingly strange and distasteful, but he endured them. It wasn't as if he was in a position to barter, either way.

James' hazel eyes bore into Severus' black ones. This was another queer trait of James' manner of having sex that made Severus very nervous. He would have liked to pretend that their encounters were impersonal ones, much like being bitten by a stray dog. But, it was hard to ignore his partner when he so pointedly stared him down.

Severus let his eyes slide away nervously. They moved down to look at James' hand hanging onto his leg, above the knee. As they did, he saw James' hand twitch, then lock down hard on his thigh. The pace sped up painfully.

"Uh!" Severus grunted.

James had thrown Severus' knees tight against his chest, causing the Slytherin to lose his grip on the toilet seat and slip, the exposed piping behind hitting him between the shoulders with bruising force.

"Like that," James grunted out above him. "Make some noises."

Severus bit his lip, tasting blood as he did so, though he wasn't sure if it was the bite or the way his teeth had clacked together when he fell that caused it. He wasn't about to make any embarrassing noises for James Potter. It hadn't been one of his requirements and he wasn't about to let himself be bullied into it, either.

After a short pause in communications (but none in the rhythm), James' thrusts became even rougher. Severus' stomach muscles clenched, an uneasy ache beginning in his lower abdomen.

This cruel pace was not surprising to Severus. He had come to realize that James Potter, considered the harmless class clown and social head of their class, had a lot more problems than anyone could have guessed. Severus considered it his bad luck that most of it came out during sex.

With a sudden finality characteristic to his outbursts, James let go of Severus' legs, causing the boy to almost fall again, and grasped his hip with one hand and tangled the other in Severus' hair. James used both of his hands as leverage to slam into Severus with new force, causing the boy's eyes to go wide with the new depth, strength, and pain of each thrust.

Big salty drops started to trail down Severus' face as his mind became encased in a hormone thick cloud. Strangled mewling noises crawled out from the back of Severus' throat, despite his own distant attempts to squash them. They were barely audible over the sound of slapping flesh.

James growled, a feral sound in the back of his throat. He used his grip on Severus' head to yank the boy closer to him. For a single second, his face went soft, hazel eyes that once looked gray shining with golds and greens. An agile pink tongue darted out from James' mouth and licked up a single long trail of tears.

"Severus..." James grunted, before coming hard into the Slytherin boy beneath him.

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"So, are you going to tell me what was important enough to get *the* Severus Snape to dress up in his Sunday best?" James joked, as he leaned against a sink and watched the boy he had just ravished struggle to button up his shirt.

Of course, Severus would sooner cut out his own tongue than tell such a thing to James Potter.

Severus had to remain sitting half in and half out of the stall they had just screwed in, because his legs couldn't hold his weight yet. Though his partner was already cleaned up and fully clothed, Severus was still sitting on the cold damp tile floor, with only his shirt left to cover his bruised and still flushed flesh.

James sauntered over to Severus' place on the floor, leaning over to take up a lock of his hair and rub it between his fingers. "I think you even washed your hair. Don't tell me you got all gussied up and scurried around with your head down just to drive me crazy," James joked, only earning Severus' ire, as the smaller boy smacked away his hand.

There was a long, pregnant pause in which James looked down at Severus with an unreadable expression and Severus continued trying to push the small buttons of his shirt through their loops with trembling hands.

"You really are acting strange today," James muttered, before turning and walking away.

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Severus endured two more spells being shot his way (successfully dodging one) and a few more cases of ridicule before he finally finished classes for the day and returned to the Slytherin dorm. He decided to forego the fiasco he expected dinner in the Great Hall to be and instead closed

himself in his own dorm room.

He sat down heavily on his bed. He felt so tired and beaten down that even his bones seemed to ache. He slowly pulled open his robe and kicked off his shoes. He put his nice robe and his pants in the laundry basket and pushed his shoes under his bed before climbing into it. He curled into a ball under the covers.

His ass and his back still ached from earlier in the day. He wanted to take a shower, but didn't want to see the bruises he expected on his hips and his legs from James' ridiculously strong grip.

Severus let a watery sigh push out of him, only allowing it in the silence and privacy of his own empty room. He thought about how he should work on his homework before he crawled in bed. He thought about how the sun was still up and that it was way to early to be in bed at all. He thought maybe he should write his mother. But, what in the world would he say?

"Mother, I had a really terrible day. It maybe even made me want to come home, which is something I never thought I would say," Severus whispered wryly to himself.

"This is probably the most terrible birthday I've ever had," Severus said very quietly to the inside of his comforter, closing his eyes at the weight of words traveling past his lips. "Ever worse than that time you accidentally put teeth in my birthday cake," he laughed to himself, his own laugh sounding too close to a sob for even his own liking.

Severus squeezed his eyes shut and wished for sleep. He just wanted the day to finally be over.

## Eighty-nine

The Great Hall was a bustling nexus of energy and good food. The long tables were always stacked high with platters of battered, fried, baked and spit roasted food. The smell of roasted meat and perfectly cooked vegetables warmed the children gathered around them.

Good food and bearable company should have made Severus happy or, at least, eased his relative discomfort. Few things were as nice as stuffing himself with good food while allowing his thoughts to be drowned out by the excited talk around him. Studying in a dim corner of the library or maybe having his dorm room to himself to do the same were better, probably. But, meals in the Great Hall were still very nice.

That being the case, it frustrated Severus to no end that he couldn't enjoy himself. The food smelled just as good as it usually did (cottage pie was being served that night, thick creamy mashed potatoes baked on top of a heavy mix of ground beef and vegetables in gravy). The students around him were having a lively debate about the Slytherin quidditch team's current standing among the other houses, a conversation he could enjoy listening to without any need to involve himself. Even with these nice conditions, Severus still felt uneasy.

It had started on his birthday; a queasy feeling settled low in his gut and never seemed to fully dissipate. He felt on the edge of being nauseous at times, a flush creeping up his neck and his vision swimming momentarily, before the feeling passed. At the time that it had started, he had assumed that it was just lingering depression on the mess that had been his birthday.

He felt stupid for even letting it hurt him. He knew that other children got presents for their birthdays, they got birthday cakes and birthday wishes. He knew that the same way that he knew that there were pyramids in Egypt and that muggles rode in cars. It was something that he knew objectively, but didn't actually affect him. The fact that other children celebrated birthdays and often had quite nice birthdays shouldn't have made him sad. Those facts didn't have anything to do with him. He wasn't most people.

It had cheered him slightly when he received a small package the day after his birthday from his mother. It contained a warm written letter as well as a small pack of lumpy cookies. He had hidden in his dorm afterward to slowly eat each cookie. His mother must not have mixed the batter for very long and probably hadn't sifted the flour. There was clumps of flour and few that were very salty in the middle. They weren't very good, but he was glad for them anyway.

Severus stared down at the meager contents of his plate. He had only put a very small amount of food on it, since he hadn't been able to muster up much of an appetite since the twisted feeling in his gut had set in. But, looking down at the warm melting food, he knew he wouldn't even be able to eat what little he had doled out for himself.

Sighing in exasperation, Severus pushed his plate away, gathered up the books he had sat on the floor by his feet and stood up. The other students who were sitting around him didn't stop talking or look up as he slowly walked away from his table and out into the hall.

The corridor was empty, all of the other students still in the middle of supper. Severus considered descending down into the dungeons and to the common room of his dorm room to take advantage of the quiet. Or, he could go to the library before it closed. But, just at that moment, he didn't really want to be inside.

Turning sharply to his left, Severus headed toward the huge front doors of Hogwarts. They swung open slightly at his approach, obediently allowing him to step outside into the crisp evening air.

It was still relatively early in the year, the bite of October frost just beginning to set in. The trees were beginning to turn the warm colors of yellow and orange around the edges. The grass was getting dry and crunchy. The days were still long enough that streaks of sunlight were still struggling across the steadily darkening Scottish sky when Severus stepped outside.

The brush of cool air against his flushed cheeks and the smell of drying leaves helped to un-knot his stomach.

Feeling significantly more relaxed, Severus followed the path down into the grounds before turning to the left and continuing down the winding steps that would eventually lead down to the boat house. He got about halfway down before settling himself on one of the steps, his books beside him and his head braced on his hands, elbows on his knees.

Severus was uneasy and it wasn't because of his birthday. Or, at least, it wasn't only because of his birthday.

He could only assume that, like most things in his life these days, the problem was James Potter.

Their bet had started off as joke. James had obviously never expected Severus to take him seriously and Severus had never expected him to agree to fuck him. He had intended to call James Potter's bluff and make him feel flustered for once. Obviously, it hadn't turned out that way.

They started their bet with the shared intention of forcing the other to back down. Neither would and things only escalated from there.

Severus was tired.

He was bone weary of the game the two of them were playing. He hated exchanging angry words and cruel looks even while they bared the most vulnerable parts of themselves to each other.

He was so tired. He felt like every insult that James had landed wore him down a little each time. He had once felt like a boulder that James Potter, ever used to getting his way, could never move. Now, he felt like a pebble that James could easily toss from hand to hand. There was very little fight left in Severus.

Their bet would come to a close soon and Severus found himself looking forward to it, whether James kept his word about breaking up with Lily or not. He just wanted the whole thing to be over.

That thought left a sour taste in the back of his throat. Severus so wanted Lily to be happy and he couldn't fathom she could achieve that with a cruel boy like James. But, maybe he really wasn't what she deserved either.

Heaving a heavy sigh, Severus looked out over the water of the lake. The giant squid's dark form was easily visible under the water from where he was sitting. The setting sun's last rays rippled over the water, reflecting back white, red and orange back at the boy brooding on the steps.

Severus curled up further, resting his forearms on his knees and his forehead on his forearms. He let his eyes fall closed and tried to focus on the sound of his own breath in the cradle of his body.

He wasn't sure how long he sat like that before the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs toward him brought his head up and around. It was darker than when he put his head down, but not completely dark yet, so a pretty good chunk of time must have gone by.

Severus turned around, expecting to see a teacher coming down the stairs to scold him or (god forbid) try to comfort him. He felt his stomach drop when instead he recognized the figure approaching him as James Potter himself.

Huffing a sound of frustration out through his nose, Severus turned back around and settled his chin on top of his arms. He didn't want to change his position for Potter's sake, but at the same time didn't want him to see him moping.

James stopped a few steps above Severus and shoved his hands into his pockets. He smirked down at the boy curled up on the steps below him, his smile anything but kind. "What are you doing down here?" he asked. "Moping?" he teased.

Severus ignored him and the accuracy of his question and kept his eyes focused on the slowly shifting shadow of the giant squid near the center of the lake. Ignoring James had never really worked before, but he could still hope.

James descended two more steps and leaned over Severus, trying to catch a look at his expression. "That was a joke," James explained, sounding exasperated. "You're supposed to say something like, 'No, Potter, you daft twit, I'm not moping!'" James mimicked him in a nasally voice.

Severus continued to ignore him. He wondered about when the squid would go into hibernation. It was starting to get colder, so he assumed that it would be soon.

James paused and waited for Severus to answer. When it became apparent that he wouldn't, he skipped down the remaining few steps until he was standing a few feet below Severus and looked up angrily at him.

"Are you sleeping with your eyes open?" James asked incredulously. "Because, honestly, that is terribly disturbing. And, I had thought you couldn't be more creepy."

Severus sighed heavily and let his eyes fall closed. Ignoring him had been a long shot.

"No, Potter," he said heavily. "I am neither moping nor sleeping with my eyes open. Is your curiosity sated?" he asked, with a pointed glare. "Can you leave now?"

James' face split open in a grin. "Not in the slightest!" he chirped, apparently responding to the question about his curiosity. "I have this suspicion that you are still avoiding me."

Severus resisted the urge to roll his eyes, then realized that there was no reason to resist. He rolled his eyes heavenward, and replied sarcastically, "My, I can't imagine why I would do that."

"Neither can I!" James agreed over much, his smile bright and happy. The tightness around his eyes and jaws spoke to the barely restrained anger underneath.

Severus pointedly turned away, looking back toward the lake. Then, further toward the west where the sun had already dipped below the peaks and turrets of Hogwarts castle.

James' smile dropped. Severus would have seen frustration winning out over his anger if he had decided to look at James in that moment. "I can't help but feel that you're trying to avoid completing our bet. Which is a little surprising. I would have thought you would be chomping at the bit to finish it," James speculated, leaning closer to Severus.

Severus' huffed out another breath, not looking in James' direction even as he felt his eyes drill into the side of his head. "Yes, because I so look forward to the feeling of your dick drilling into my arse," he deadpanned.

A choked laugh slipped out of James before he responded sharply, "I can't imagine there's much else to look forward to in the dreadfully sad life you live."

Severus' head snapped around; pain, anger and hurt flared brightly in his chest. Blood pooled in his cheeks even as he felt his lips pull apart in a snarl.

But, the sight of James' expression doused Severus' anger.

He looked eager, his eyes dilated slightly, and his lips parted.

Severus' was being baited. James wanted to fight. He wanted to argue. Severus was usually quick to anger and even quicker with an insult. He realized, belatedly, that he was an easy target.

The heat of Severus' anger drained so quickly that he felt a little light headed for a moment. In the aching emptiness left behind, Severus could only identify weariness.

He was so tired.

Severus turned away again, the sting of James' insult already forgotten. He decided he would go back to ignoring James. If he was looking for a fight and Severus refused to give it to him, hopefully he would soon leave in search of easier prey.

The silence stretched and Severus felt more than saw James' body become more and more stiff, muscles twisting and knotting up the longer he ignored him.

"So," James bit out, after Severus appeared to be clearly ignoring him again. "You admit that the only thing you have to look forward to is a good solid fuck from me," James goaded, each word harsh and stilted.

Severus continued to ignore him even though he could practically feel James vibrating with anger in front of him.

"Perhaps you're afraid that our little tete a tetes will end to soon?" James asked, the question phrased more as an accusation than a tease. "Perhaps you want to savor every remaining moment with my glorious cock?" he asked, leaning in closer, his smile becoming pointedly lewd.

Severus found that he couldn't even keep up the illusion of being unaffected when James was so close to his face and whispering such filthy things, his breath breaking warm and wet against Severus' cheek.

With a bit off sound of frustration, Severus leaned away from James and grabbed his books angrily before standing up and starting up the stairs.

"Hey!" James shouted angrily, grabbing Severus roughly by his upper arm and jerking him backward. "Don't walk away from me," James snapped, his facade of teasing and camaraderie peeling away completely.

Severus was rattled a little. It wasn't often that James let himself slip like that. But, he was too busy being angry and offended to really care.

"Let go of me," Severus said as quietly and evenly as he could.

"I'm talking to you," James snapped back.

Severus sneered. "Since you can't take a hint, let me spell it out for you." Severus leaned closer, invading James' space and forcing him to lean back slightly. "I do not want to talk to you," Severus spat, each word carefully enunciated and emphasized.

Then, with a sharp jerk and a turn that broke James' hold on him, Severus continued up the steps leaving a stunned James behind him.

He made it maybe five steps before he felt a pair of hands shove him hard from behind.

Severus gasped and felt his eyes go wide. He threw the hand that wasn't holding his books out in front of him to break his fall, but the angle was all wrong. His knee hit the stair in front of him first, the edge of the step digging into the soft flesh between his shin and kneecap. His leg gave out and then he was falling sideways and onto the bank leading sharply down to the lake below.

The stairs down to the boat house were built into the side of the steep incline that lead from the high point of Hogwarts down to the low lying area around the lake. There were no rails along the stairs, which Severus had always thought was dangerous. But, he had never heard of anyone falling, so he thought maybe it didn't matter. Which was exceedingly foolish, in retrospect.

Severus tumbled over and over down the hill. He felt himself being tenderized by rocks and sharp corners as he rolled and rolled. He vaguely realized that he must have dropped his books when his knee hit the step, because both of his hands were thrown over his head.

When he hit the water, it shocked the air out of his lungs. It was the middle of October and the water was bitter cold, much too cold for swimming.

The incline was sharp even in the water, so Severus plunged beneath the surface and had to struggle to swim back up. The weight of his frayed and patched robe pulled him down, his ill fitting shoes only helping to obstruct his attempts to tread water. Severus gasped down some air and a good bit of water before allowing his own unwieldy weight to pull him back under.

Underwater, Severus shrugged out of his robe. It was ragged and he had a few more in his dorm room, so he didn't worry about letting it sink into down into the dark opaque water. He then struggled to pull off his shoes one by one. Those he would have to hold onto to, but at least he could get them off of his feet and make it a little easier to swim.

As he was working on getting his second shoe off, Severus felt the water around him shift and heard the muffled sound of something else breaking the surface.

Severus pulled his remaining shoe off hastily and swam back up to the surface. Once his head broke the surface, a pair of hands grasped his soaked shirt and yanked him bodily toward the bank.

"Snape!" he heard James gasp.

Severus pushed water and hair off of his face impatiently so that he could get a better look at James' face. He looked worried, his face pale and his mouth thin and bloodless. His glasses splashed with water and made it hard to see his eyes. He was hauling Severus forward toward the bank and Severus let him.

When the two of them were panting, mostly levered out of the freezing water and onto the rocky bank, Severus remembered whose fault it was that he had fallen into the lake in the first place.

"What the fuck is wrong with you!" Snape threw at James between gasps for breath.

James seemed to have the presence of mind to look ashamed, a small amount of color returning to his cheeks as he pulled off his glasses. He moved to wipe them on his shirt before belatedly realizing his shirt was soaked and unlikely to be able to absorb any water.

"You've been avoiding me," James muttered petulantly toward his lap.

"So you push me off a cliff?!" Snape yelled incredulously, his voice jumping up an octave and cracking, to his shame.

James looked up at Severus and wrinkled his nose in distaste. "It's hardly a cliff," he replied dryly.

Severus made a barely contained screech of frustration before struggling to his feet only to be knocked onto his back by James.

Severus and James wrestled for a tense few minutes, but they were ill matched. Even if Severus wasn't smarting in at least a dozen places from his tumble down the hill, he was still a good twenty pounds lighter than James and significantly less athletic overall. It didn't take long for James to pin Severus to the ground by his shoulders, his weight settled on his hips.

"You've been avoiding me," James repeated for the third time, his voice strangled, his breathing coming in gasps. He was dripping water down onto Severus, his chest heaving visibly beneath his thin white shirt.

"I have not been avoiding you," Severus ground out, giving James an ineffectual shove. "Do you have any idea how maddening it is to have someone insist you have been doing something you haven't?"

James stared at Severus for a long time. He had discarded his glasses somewhere and his hazel gray eyes were unyielding as they scanned over his features, looking for something only James knew. Whatever he was looking for, he must have found it, because a sharp grin grew over his face.

Leaning forward, James' mouth was just a few scant inches from Severus' before he whispered, "Then, don't run away."

Severus froze, both because he was afraid if he so much as twitched that James and he would be kissing (something he did not want to initiate) and because of the words that had just come out of James' mouth. He hadn't been running, had he? He hadn't thought so. But, it was true that he hadn't wanted to meet with James, even if he didn't consciously do anything to prevent it. Had he maybe been avoiding him unconsciously?

Before Severus could begin pondering the question too deeply, he felt James' roughened fingers fumbling at his belt.

"Are you serious?" Severus said, the delivery so dry that even he was surprised.

James looked up and grinned at him impishly as he pulled Severus' belt open and popped the top button on his pants.

Severus let his head fall back against the rough ground with a small sound of resignation.

James hadn't come after him angling for a fight, he had come for a fuck. It was just that most of their fucks started with a fight. Somehow, Severus hated that even more than the previously held belief that James just wanted pick a fight with him.

A small gasp slipped out of Severus' mouth at the feeling of James' rough hands rubbing at his flaccid cock. Even through the chill of the quickly approaching night and his own soggy clothes, Severus felt a curl of hot arousal begin in his stomach.

"Don't run," James mumbled again.

Severus glanced down to watch James fumble at his own belt and fly with his left hand even as his right hand continued to fondle Severus. James was leaning close to him, his collar bone and wide shoulders taking up much of his view. James was fit. Severus observed this as objectively as he could while his cock slowly got harder in his pants.

Huffing out an impatient breath, Severus let his head fall back down with a little thump. "You're an idiot," he replied, his voice sounding a little off. He blamed it on all the water he had just swallowed.

James eventually worked Severus to full hardness. Afterward, he pushed Severus' pants down over his hips. Severus glanced self consciously up toward the stairs above them.

They were high high above. The angle was all wrong for anyone to casually stumble upon them. Someone would have to be standing on the stairs and looking straight down to catch the two of them. Besides that, it was nearly completely dark by that point, meaning it would have been even more difficult to spot them at a distance. That didn't stop Severus' heart from speeding up in a little burst of anxiety.

While Severus was fretting, James had taken the opportunity to line his already exceedingly hard throbbing dick up with Severus' noticeably less enthusiastic one. He kept one calloused hand loosely looped around the both of them, keeping them aligned and assuring that, once James began thrusting, each push would press his dick against Severus'.

With the first push, Severus gasped. The friction felt so wonderful, sending a pulse of warmth through his otherwise quickly chilling body.

"Look at me," James growled.

Severus squeezed his eyes shut, something like fear pulsing alongside the pleasure curling in his gut. James had started up an unsteady rhythm, his dick pressing firmly against Severus' with each thrust.

"Snape, look at me," James repeated, the words coming from close to Severus' face.

Against his better judgement, Severus peeked out at James through his eyelashes. He looked wild, his brows drawn down low over eyes that were blown so wide there was barely any color left in them. His free hand was still pushing Severus firmly into the bank and when their eyes met, James' hand squeezed for a moment.

James smiled down at Severus with too many teeth and picked up the pace.

Severus' breaths steadily built into pants. Above him, James was breathing even heavier, small grunts sometimes accompanying his movements. Severus was afraid that their sounds may alert some poor passerby to them, but the fear only seemed to spur his pleasure on.

He clenched his hand in dirt and pulled up a handful of grass. It was embarrassingly fast when he came, his thighs and stomach clenching and twitching and his head tilting back. He wasn't sure, but he thought he felt James lick and bite his throat hard through his orgasm.

Severus' made a displeased sound when James kept working his oversensitive dick. For a moment, he was afraid that the Gryffindor would keep jerking him, but he left off soon enough.

"Stay still," James gasped, his hand clenching on Severus' shoulder.

James kept jerking himself off. Severus did, indeed, stay still and quiet as he lay there and did his best not to stare at James as he masturbated himself furiously over him.

It was probably the longest and top ten for the most awkward three minutes of his life, waiting for the moment when James finally came all over his own hand and Severus' own semen speckled stomach with a half swallowed grunt.

James hovered over Severus with his dick still in his hand for two breaths, maybe three, before flopping onto his back beside him.

Severus laid there silently for a long moment before tucking himself back into his pants and doing his belt back up. He focused on taking deep breaths as he stared up at the night sky. It was dark enough that pinprick stars were adorning the sky to the west.

Severus felt unsettled, not just because of the admittedly pretty good orgasm he had just experienced. Something was wrong, off. Like the ground had shifted just slightly below his feet, but now that it had stopped he couldn't be sure it had actually happened.

James huffed out a laugh beside him and tried to wring out his tie. "I can't imagine what we look like right now," he laughed. "What will the lads say?" he asked wistfully.

Severus looked over, a small mow of distaste on his face. James looked back at him, his smile warm and familiar.

Again, Severus felt it. Something was off, something was wrong. Somehow, gradually, something had changed.

Hurriedly, Severus sat up and started to scramble up the bank.

"Hey!" James shouted. When Severus glanced back, he was somewhat relieved to see that warmth that had been on James' face had been replaced by irritation. "Where are you going?" James shouted at him, scrambling up himself.

Severus turned and gave James a solid shove with both hands. James had a moment to look completely stunned, before he tumbled head over feet backward into the lake.

Severus waited for a moment for the sense of vindication or accomplishment such an act normally would have caused him to wash over him. When it didn't come, he cursed rather colorfully, before hurrying back up the bank.

James was yelling at him, insults and cuss words flying loudly through the brisk night air along with the sounds of splashing water. Severus ignored him.

The books that Severus had dropped were sitting in a small tumbled pile right where he had fell. Before picking them up, Severus checked his pockets until he found his wand in his back pants pocket.

Severus jerked his wand and muttered, “**Exaresco**,” quickly evaporating the water on himself and his clothes before gathering up his books in his arms.

He ran for the doors of Hogwarts like there were ghosts nipping at his heels. So far as he was concerned, they might as well have been.

## Eighty-nine

Severus put his mind to ignoring James as much as possible in the coming days. Or, rather, he put his mind into putting James out of his mind.

The rationale was that if he was subconsciously avoiding James, it was most likely because he spent so much time thinking about him and fretting over their next encounter. If that was true, and Severus was rather sure it was, then it followed that if he just didn't think of James all the time he wouldn't continue to accidentally avoid him.

The problem was that Severus didn't think he would be able to stop thinking about him. He didn't realize until he started to consciously patrol his thoughts just how much time he spent thinking about James Potter.

He thought about how cruel he was, how petty, how stunted his personality was. He dwelled on his appearance, on his silky fluffy hair, on his gold framed glasses, on his healthy skin tone. He spent long arduous hours having fake conversations with James in his head and tweaking his come backs until they were just the perfect mix between dry and disinterested and absolutely scathing.

It was honestly shameful how much time he spent thinking about a boy he professed to hate.

For a time, Severus was at a loss as to how to combat the thoughts. They seemed to come to him unbidden any moment he had alone to himself. And, he had quite a lot of those as he preferred to be alone as a matter of course. It had begun to seem hopeless, until Severus realized that he could put James out of his mind by focusing on something, anything, with enough concentration.

This worked out wonderfully, as Severus was no stranger to studying and pointed focus. He was already an exceptional student in almost all regards (with the exception, maybe, of divination, which he constantly regretted taking). But, that didn't mean that he couldn't get ahead on his classes.

For the next few days, flowing into a week, Severus focused on reading. When he finished all of his textbooks, he moved on to related subjects in the library. He kept notes and set himself projects

to test his knowledge. It was somewhat freeing, both not thinking about James and worrying about their next encounter.

That was why it took him so completely by surprise when James cornered him on the moving staircases late one Saturday evening.

He had decided to run up to the library before it closed, his latest self assigned charms project had been nagging at the back of his head all day. He was hoping he could find a book that would clarify exactly what difference a twitch and a jerk meant in terms of spell casting. He followed the path he usually took while still racking his brain for the exact definitions. He was so sure that he knew this, but he just couldn't remember.

Severus was so absorbed in his own thoughts that he almost fell backward down the stairs when a hand reached out and grabbed the back of his cloak and yanked.

The young Slytherin saved himself at the last moment by taking tight hold of the rail.

"Don't ignore me," James bit out as he jogged up the last few steps to stand even with Severus.

Blinking and trying to steady his frantically beating heart, Severus gave James a quick once over. His hair was windswept and his cheeks very pink. There was mud clinging to the edge of his cloak and he still had leather padding strapped to his shins and forearms. It was obvious he had just come from the Quidditch field.

Severus gave James a disdainful look. He had no idea why James wouldn't have changed before he came into the castle proper, tracking mud behind him with every step, but it wasn't any of his business. He supposed that James must have shouted at him, but Severus was too lost in his own thoughts to notice. That caused a small bloom of pride to blossom in his chest at the thought.

"What do you want, Potter?" Severus asked, allowing some exasperation to bleed into his voice.

James huffed out an impatient breath, making a face that indicated he was fully aware that Severus hadn't denied his initial accusation. "Where are you going?" James shot back. "It's almost curfew."

Severus raised his eyebrows somewhat at that. There was still over an hour until he had to be back in the Slytherin dorms.

"I'm going to the library, if you must know," Severus replied, turning and continuing up the steps as it appeared that James didn't have any real intentions when he stopped him. Or, if he did, he was going to be painfully slow in getting to it. And, Snape really didn't have much time until Madame Pince closed the library for the night.

"It's closing," James replied shortly, following behind Severus closely.

Snape scoffed, "Yes, Potter. I am well aware. I want to get there before it closes."

"Why?" James asked, sounding baffled as to why anyone would put themselves out to get to the library.

"I can't see how that, or any of this, is any of your business," Severus sighed, already tired of James games. He couldn't possibly actually care. Severus wished he would just reach his point or let him go on his merry way.

"I can't see why what book you want should be such a great secret," James shot back quickly, his

breath coming somewhat quicker as he struggled to keep up with Severus' fast pace. Severus assumed he was still tired from Quidditch practice, but didn't pity him a whit.

"It's more that I find this conversation exceedingly tedious and was hoping that if I stopped answering your idiotic and frankly prying questions, you would leave off and go find some poor girl to tumble or something," Severus responded dryly and without missing a beat.

"My, you're in rare form today," James responded and, Severus may have been mistaken, but he thought he sounded somewhat impressed.

"Mm," Severus hummed, a noncommittal and, hopefully, a distinctly unimpressed sound.

Severus finally reached the top of the stairs and took a sharp left, heading down the long echoing corridor toward the heavy wooden doors that lead to the library. The hallway was large, with a very tall arched ceiling and regularly spaced alcoves sometimes decorated with marble busts or suits of armor. The tile floors were lit by the flickering candles set in wax dappled wall sconces.

"I'm sure you've read more than enough books this week," James said after a few beats of following silently behind Severus. "I've a much better idea." He sounded so self-satisfied and confident that Severus couldn't help but to roll his eyes toward the ceiling.

"I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea what you have in mind," Severus replied, lacing his words with heavy sarcasm.

As he moved to push open the library doors, hoping from the bottom of his heart that they would swing open, that Madame Pince hadn't locked them up prematurely as she sometimes did, James took hold of his other wrist and gave a sharp tug. Severus tipped backward and was only able to keep his balance by holding tight to James' hand.

Once he regained his balance, he snatched his hand back and shot James a scathing look. The Gryffindor smiled blithely back at him.

"This is different," he said happily. "I really think you'll like it! And, I'm eager to try it, most of all. Besides, I'm not totally convinced that you aren't still avoiding me," James added, squinting suspiciously at Snape.

Severus returned him a blank stare. "I am not avoiding you," he said flatly.

"You've been in the library or your dorm all the time," James shot back quickly, his thick brows drawing low over his eyes. "You go from class to class with no stops, you stay in the Great Hall only long enough to eat a few bites and then you're off again. That's not you avoiding me?" he arched a brow.

"No," Severus sneered. "That's me. I've been focused on my studies. Besides, you could have fetched me any time you wanted while I was in the library."

"That would have required me to go into the library," James replied.

It was Severus' turn to arch an eyebrow.

"Madame Pince is scary," James added soberly.

Snape sighed heavily. He had probably spent long enough dallying with James that Pince would be chasing him out of the library before he got close to finding the book that would help him. Besides, it's not like it was something that couldn't wait for tomorrow.

Severus waved a hand in the air in an impatient, 'get on with it' motion while saying, "Show me your stupid thing." He hoped it looked like it was the absolute last thing on earth he wanted to do. From the way that James' face broke out in a mischievous grin, it wasn't.

James turned quickly and shot off back down the hallway without a backward glance in Severus' direction. The Slytherin was somewhat impressed (or maybe worried) by James' apparent trust that he would follow. Against his better judgement, Severus did just that.

They turned corners a few times until Severus was suitably turned around. He knew they were still on the same floor as the library, but they were now in a corridor filled with doors that Severus was unfamiliar with.

James stopped for a moment and looked around at the doors in the hall, a look of concentration on his face, before he strode forward and pulled open the door nearest him.

Severus peaked over James' shoulder to see inside. It was obviously a classroom, with a large solid wooden desk beside the door with a blackboard directly behind it. There were student's desks and chairs, but they were all stacked on one another and pushed against the bare stone walls. There were no windows on the walls, only a glass ceiling that let moonlight stream into the lonely classroom.

"This should do," James said slowly, walking in without a care. "Close the door behind you, would you?" he said absentmindedly.

Severus bit his tongue and followed James inside, pulling the door shut behind him. He had the distinct feeling that he wasn't meant to be in that room. It felt like small bugs crawling beneath his skin or cold fingers running up his arm.

"What did you want to do?" Severus said, maybe a little too quickly. He was anxious to whatever James wanted to try over with so that he could go back to the dorms. Preferably without having to worry about being caught out after curfew.

James turned back from staring up at the opaque glass ceiling to smile brightly at Severus.

"Strip and lie on your back on the teacher's desk," James instructed with a grin before turning back to his examination of the ceiling.

Severus sighed audibly, hoping James could hear how put out he was by this request by his single exhalation. He certainly wasn't surprised. How could he be? It wasn't as if James would approach him for anything except their very immature and much out of control bet.

Pointedly telling himself not to dwell on it (he had been doing so well!), Severus quickly shucked his cloak, tie, shirt, shoes and pants. He fiddled with his underwear for a moment, shooting an uncertain look at James' back. He was still staring upward. Severus looked up, as well, but didn't see anything all that interesting. He shucked his underwear and then hoisted himself up onto the desk and laid down on his back.

He stared up at the glass ceiling. He wondered where they were in the castle that there were no floors above them. Or, at least, he thought there weren't. It's possible that the ceiling was enchanted to look like glass and night sky, but actually wasn't, much like the Great Hall. It seemed a large bit of magic to use on a now abandoned classroom, though.

"Do you think the glass is dirty or frosted?" James asked slowly.

Severus spared him a short annoyed look, before answering flatly, "I'm sure I have no idea."

James turned back around to grin at him, though Severus couldn't imagine why. It's not like his reply was especially funny or witty.

Still grinning, James quickly yanked off his knee and arm padding. He dropped his cloak to the floor and kicked off his shoes before leaning over Severus. He braced his hands on either side of Severus' head and looked down at him upside down. "Sorry, love. Have I kept you waiting?" James teased.

Severus rolled his eyes and did his best to look bored. It wasn't hard.

"As you pointed out, it is almost curfew. I hope this magical new thing you wanted to try out doesn't take very long," Severus pointed out.

"I shall be the soul of brevity," James replied, his voice decidedly breathier than it was just a moment ago.

With no further ado, James braced his knees by Severus' head and started to crawl onto the desk and down Severus' body.

Sputtering and surprised, Severus started to push up onto his elbows until he realized that nearly pressed his face directly into Potter's crotch.

"What in the world are you doing?" Snape settled on crying, feeling blood rush to his face in embarrassment.

"Have you ever heard of sixty nine?" James asked conversationally, while casually wrapping a hand around Severus' flaccid dick and carefully massaging it.

"That is a number," Severus pushed out. His voice sounded strangled, even to himself. "You're asking me if I'm familiar with a number."

James scoffed, the sound suspiciously similar to a choked off laugh. "It's a sex position, also. I assume you aren't familiar with it, then."

"No, I am not," Severus snapped, turning his face away from what he could very clearly see, even in the weak light from the night sky, was a powerful erection in James' pants.

"It's very simple," James said, pausing to give the tip of Severus' cock a perfunctory lick. "Two peoples position themselves like so and then proceed to perform oral sex on each other."

"This is stupid," Severus bit out, struggling to get out from underneath James. This was possibly the most embarrassing position the other boy had ever tried to push him into, worse even than just a normal blowjob, and he wanted nothing to do with it.

James roughly pinned Severus' hips to the desk, pushing down with strong defined arms even as he arched and looked down the length of himself to glare at Snape.

"I've been wanting to do this for days. But, you've been as hard to find, as usual," James barked, looking to be very suddenly short on patience. "So, you can either do this with me or I'll think long and hard and come up with something significantly worse."

Severus felt a shudder go down his spine and quickly went silent. In the course of their bet, he and James had tried various types of sex and some of them Severus had not liked at all. Oral was one of them. He had no doubt in his mind that James could make good on his threat.

"We're not doing this again," Severus grumbled, forcing his body to go lax against the desk.

"We'll see," James snarked, obviously pleased with the outcome.

James went back to massaging and licking Severus' dick while Severus bleakly contemplated Potter's dick as it strained against the front of his trousers. Against his will, he felt himself growing harder in Potter's hand, but couldn't muster up the courage to touch Potter's dick in return.

"You know, if you just want to lie here, I can always just grind my dick in your face," James muttered into Snape's crotch as he licked a long stripe from his balls to his head.

Severus swallowed an undignified noise as well as his pride and reached up to undo James' pants.

The second he unzipped James' pants, the other boy pushed them and his boxers down over his hips and out of the way. James' dick hung heavy and hard between his legs, curling up toward his belly button. It was big and thick and had visible veins running along the other side. The smell of it hit Severus full in the face and he felt his own dick twitch in response, eliciting a giddy chuckle from James.

Swallowing all the saliva that was suddenly in his mouth, Severus leaned up to give James' dick a curious lick. He came away with a smear of precome on his tongue, viscous, salty and a little bitter just as he remembered it.

Snape wrinkled his nose. It wasn't a taste he especially liked, but it wasn't terrible. Down his body, James had made an embarrassingly high sound in reaction and that had been pretty nice. The attention that the Gryffindor boy was paying to his dick was pretty nice too.

Severus doubted it would take long to make James come. Not when he was already that hard and that sensitive.

Sighing, Severus leaned up again and placed a lewd wet kiss to head of James's dick. The skin of his glans was soft and firm and the whole thing twitched with he gave a small suck.

Severus tucked his elbows underneath him to make it easier to reach up for James' dick. He kissed up the underside of his cock, paying special attention to the throbbing veins, they way they collapsed and popped back up under the pressure of his tongue. He kept going up until he was nosing and licking at James' balls. The sweat from practice made his smell and taste the strongest there, so Severus didn't linger long.

On either side of him, James' thighs were trembling and he could see his stomach muscles clenching. James' hot breath broke warm over Severus' own dick, his kisses and licks messy.

"Keep going," James groaned, before taking Snape's dick into his mouth and sucking hard, making the boy beneath him gasp and twitch.

Ignoring the blush burning across his face, Severus went back to James' cock and followed suit.

He kissed James' dick again, his lips pressed against the glans and sucking gently. He tongued his head and then ran out around the edge, under the ridge and dipped down into the hole, lapping up the thick semen that kept steadily building there.

Moving slowly, he worked James' dick deeper into his mouth inch by half inch. Each time he added a little bit, he would pull back until just the head was left, sucking the whole way. Then, he would slide James' dick back into his mouth, tonguing the underside along the way.

Snape was only able to get James' dick about halfway down his throat before it tightened up and the threat of gagging became too great. The angle was all wrong, his neck and jaw were getting sore and his own arms were shaking from reaching up for James' dick the whole time.

Determined to make James finish, if just to give his own aching neck some relief, Severus worked his dick extra hard. He sucked and licked and pushed it as deep as he could into his throat.

He was starting to think that it wouldn't work. It felt like he had been sucking James' dick forever. When, somewhat abruptly, James lifted up off of him, gasped harshly, and came down his throat hard.

Severus jerked back as soon as he felt it, something shooting right toward the back of his throat. He gagged sharply and scrambled for the edge of the desk. He leaned over it, his stomach convulsing, gagging loudly. He tasted bile hit the back of his tongue, but swallowed it back quickly.

"Sorry," James said from somewhere near his hip. He sounded breathless and more than a little addled. "I forgot to warn you," he added.

Severus wanted to snap at him, but didn't trust his voice. The gagging subsided, but his throat felt tight and his mouth felt dry. He tried to spit one last time onto the classroom floor anyway.

Sitting up, Severus tried to give James a dirty look. But, he looked entirely too blissed out, lying loose and relaxed on his back on the desk.

"You didn't even get fully hard," James said quietly, something like a pout hovering around his lips.

Severus frowned down at his lap and his completely soft dick. That was true, he didn't think he got fully hard during the whole ordeal. It was too hard to focus on giving good head and receiving head at the same time. He had been so absorbed in what he was doing he forgot to pay attention to what was being done to him. Which was really a shame, because Severus wasn't sure that James had ever sucked him off before.

Snape sighed a little sadly and James cracked an eye at him.

"No, I didn't," Severus agreed quietly.

He slid off the desk and started to pick his clothes up off the floor. James turned his head to frown seriously at him, but he didn't pay him any attention.

Severus stepped into his pants, pulled on his shirt and pushed his shoes on. He didn't do up the buttons on his shirt or put on his socks, tie or cloak.

"Hey, you don't have to leave so soon," James grumbled, his frown even deeper as she slowly sat up off the desk.

Snape looked at James without any particular expression, shrugged on his cloak, and stepped out into the hall. He closed the door quietly behind him and quickly set off back the way they had come.

The corridor was very empty and very dark. Severus' footsteps echoed off the flagstones. He shivered, the air seeming colder in the hall even though it shouldn't be. The air smelled cleaner, the musk of sex fading the farther he got from the empty classroom.

Severus rushed back to his dorm room alone in the dark and made it back just in time for curfew.

## Ninety

The sky overhead was a slate gray, the cloud cover thick and low. The air felt heavy with rain, but it was too cold for anything but snow or hail.

The moment that Severus saw the state of the sky that morning, he knew he would need to make a trip to the forest as soon as possible. He was working on inventing his own potions, having read through his Advanced Potion Making textbook multiple times. He wanted to experiment with poisonous mushrooms, but if he waited until it snowed he would never find any.

As soon as Severus finished his dinner that night, he ran to his dorm, grabbed his heavy cloak, and then hurried back outside and toward the Forbidden Forest. It was cold and starting to get dark, the thick clouds overhead blotting out the moon or any stars that might have otherwise been shining down on the grounds. The grass underneath Severus' feet was dry and crunched as he walked over it.

He reached the forest soon enough. It was a dark bulk against far corner of the grounds that steadily grew until Severus was close enough that the trees towered over him. Reaching the edge, Severus didn't hesitate in crossing into the trees and straight towards its heart.

His extensive reading paid off quickly as he spied a spot that looked perfect for mushroom cultivation and happily found it filled with various types of poisonous mushrooms. Mushrooms tended to favor similar conditions. Somewhere warm, dark and somewhat sheltered from the weather. He found what he was looking for under a half rotten fallen log a few hundred feet past the treeline.

Severus was kneeling on the ground, dampness from the soil soaking through his pants at the knees, when he first heard the sound of rustling footsteps behind him. His head snapped around, conscious that technically he was not supposed to be in the forest by himself. It was called the 'Forbidden' Forest for a reason, after all.

Looking behind him, Severus sat up straight and craned his neck so that he could look all around in search of anyone or anything that might have made the sound. In the dim light, he didn't see anything. Severus also didn't especially want to light a *lumos* spell and reveal his location just in

case a teacher or another student did see him enter the forest and were trying to find him.

After coming to the conclusion that it must have been a small animal or maybe a burst of wind, Severus huffed out a quiet breath and went back to carefully plucking the little oddly colored mushrooms from their soft loam bed and dropping them into the small satchel he brought along for that purpose. He was only able to pluck a small handful of mushrooms before he heard the sound again, from much closer this time.

Turning around and standing up, Severus looked all around him. His breath was coming fast and his brows were drawn down low over his face. Still, he didn't see or hear anything. But, he could sense that someone was nearby, watching him.

Despairing, Severus looked down at the small bag in his hand. It was barely filled with mushrooms. He contemplated that he might have enough already if he was careful and really made his supply stretch. Was it worth it should he risk the chance of frost and try again tomorrow during daylight hours?

As Severus was debating with himself, the sound of footsteps came again, very loud and very fast. Severus even saw the leaves in front of him move as they were disturbed by whatever unseen thing was coming toward him.

Gasping, Severus quickly pulled his wand out of his pocket and pointed it at the source of the sound. He whispered a harsh, "Lumos!" and the tip of his wand ignited into a small warm light. However, it didn't illuminate anything overtly unusual.

Until, with a small choked off giggle, James Potter pulled aside the forest terrain as if it were an artfully painted mural.

Severus heaved a weary sigh and dropped his wand, extinguishing his spell. Snape stared at James' entirely too pleased face for a long moment. Of course, he now suddenly remembered James Potter's cursed invisibility cloak. Of course, it was James. It all seemed so painfully obvious at that moment.

Disgusted with himself and his own lack of critical thinking, Severus turned back around and crouched down by the log in the exact same spot he had been before he had ever heard the mysterious footsteps approaching. He opened the small bag he had brought with him and began to fill it with mushrooms again.

"Did I scare you?" James asked, laughter in his voice as he walked up and leaned over Severus' shoulder.

Severus ignored the question and the answer, 'Yes!', that immediately flew into his head. He opted to ask his own question instead.

"What are you doing here?" Severus asked, annoyance shining brightly in his words.

"Following you, of course," James replied, a heavy implication that the word 'duh' could have been added to the end of that sentence. "I'm starting to entertain ideas that you may have a secret and very exciting life after the sun goes down," James added, a grin clear in his voice. "First, you sneak into an empty classroom to have illicit sex with a male classmate. Now, you're sneaking off into the Forbidden Forest to- ... to...?" James paused and Severus continued to ignore him. "What are you doing?" James asked, sounding genuinely puzzled.

"I assure that it is nothing salacious," Snape replied dryly.

“Are you quite sure?” James asked, a tease in his voice.

“I’m gathering mushrooms,” Severus replied, holding up a mushroom toward James’ face without turning his head to look at him.

“Ah,” James replied, the fun going out of his voice. Severus dropped the mushroom into his steadily filling bag and went back for more. “It is absolutely boring, then,” James added.

“Quite,” Severus agreed.

“There goes my carefully crafted theories about your hidden wild streak,” James sighed heavily, plopping down on his butt beside Severus.

Severus gave him a long sideways look that he hoped communicated ‘why are you sitting down?’ and agreed again, “Quite.”

“Perhaps the act is not salacious, but maybe the mushrooms are!” James exclaimed after an awkward moment of silence. “Are the mushrooms salacious, Severus?”

Severus raised an eyebrow, but otherwise kept his face pointed toward the ground. “They are poisonous,” he replied flatly.

“Ah,” James replied again, sounding disappointed. “Not salacious, but depressing, at least.”

Severus plucked the last of the mushrooms and looked at his bag. It was almost full, but not quite. If James were not there, he probably would have gone in search of another patch of mushrooms to fill up his bag. But, the situation being what it was, he thought it probably best to cut his losses.

With a pointed movement, Severus tied off his bag of poisonous mushrooms and stood up. He looked over at James, who had stood up with him.

“It’s probably a fool’s errand, but I suppose I’ll ask again,” Severus said, staring blankly at James’ impish expression. “What are you doing here?”

“Well,” James said, drawing out the word slightly. “I was hoping that maybe we could participate in some mutual gratification, if you catch my meaning,” James said with an eyebrow waggle while stepping boldly into Severus’ personal space.

Severus looked away and tried to will the blood to leave his cheeks. It was hard to get used to being propositioned so bluntly like that.

‘Ninety,’ a voice in his head said. *‘If I agree, it will be the ninetieth time.’*

It was a scary, but exciting prospect at the same time. Their bet would be coming to an end soon.

“Sure,” Severus whispered, still not meeting James’ eyes.

In the corner of his vision, he could see James’ face break out into a wide grin.

“It’s cold, though,” Severus added petulantly. “Don’t you want to do this somewhere else?” Severus frowned, glancing up at James and noting that his grin hadn’t changed.

“No, this is fine. We don’t have to take all of our clothes off,” James responded, stepping even closer to Severus and backing the Slytherin boy up until he was pressed against the rough bark or a large and warped oak tree.

Severus' frown deepened. Cleaning spells weren't always super effective against the kinds of stains that fumbling at each other in the dark of a cold empty forest might produce. But, at the same time, he didn't really want to spend the necessary time to track down a secluded space inside the castle to do the same fumbling.

Being so busy turning over the pros and cons of sex outside, Severus almost didn't see James mouth until it was on his.

"What!" Severus yelped, his voice cracking embarrassingly as he jumped and struggled to press himself even further against the tree than he already was. "What are you doing!" Severus yelled once he had put an appropriate amount of space between James's face and his own.

A flash of what might have been hurt flashed across James' face before being replaced by confusion. It might have been hurt if James was the kind of man to ever experience such a thing.

"I thought it might be nice," James mumbled, still looking confused and a little put off.

Severus must have continued to look at him as if he had grown a much uglier and putrid smelling second head, because James elaborated.

"You didn't come last time, which seems unfair, even to me. I thought maybe kissing would help."

Severus felt his face flush, but told himself that it was in anger.

"I didn't come," Severus bit out slowly, "because I didn't enjoy that position. I've not come before and it never seemed to bother you," Severus accused James sharply.

"It didn't bother me before," James agreed matter of factly.

Severus wrinkled his nose and stared at James hard, as if he was an equation that he couldn't get his head around. This was a sharp turn of pace for Potter, who had been in the habit of taking what he wanted and not much caring about how Severus felt about it. Not to mention that James had been quick to point out during their faltering beginnings that kissing was off the table. As if Severus would ever want to kiss him.

The two stared at each other for a long moment, both challenging the other to say something.

Finally, Severus broke down first, as often seemed the case, and muttered a hard pressed, "Not on the mouth," before quickly looking away. Not fast enough that he didn't catch James' tell tale grin spreading across his face.

Severus suppressed a shiver as James settled his hands on his waist. His hands were warm. He must have had them in mittens or in his pockets before.

Snape failed to suppress a twitch at the feeling of James' lips pressing to his neck just beneath his jaw. The other boy's breath was warm and wet against his chilled skin. He had forgotten to grab a scarf on the way out.

James pressed his lips along the column of Severus' neck, following his pulse until he reached the junction of his throat and neck. Severus could feel himself leaning more and more against the tree as James kissed him, his knees literally growing weak.

No one had ever kissed him before and, somehow, James' kisses to his neck felt more intimate than what he imagined a kiss on the mouth might. Severus wished he hadn't agreed to kissing, as each kiss James pressed against his pounding pulse sapped more and more of his strength.

James nosed at Severus' shoulder, the end of Severus' hair tickling his nose and cheeks, before he abruptly bit down hard on the tender skin there.

Severus yelped for the second time in as many minutes and shoved James away from him. His hand flew to his neck which was still throbbing from the sharp pinch James' teeth had given him. James stumbled backward a few steps, gasping little laughs escaping as he skipped away from Severus' shoving hands.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Severus snapped, the words not coming out as angry as he had expected. He was a little glad that James had bit him, snapping him out of the sappy mood he was falling into.

James shrugged and hummed, obviously caring very little to explain himself to Snape. He was still laughing under his breath as he moved back in and cornered a scowling Severus back against the rough bark of the tree.

"No more kissing," Severus hissed as James moved to bury his face in Snape's neck. He lifted his shoulder to try and prevent James from reaching the tender spot where he had bit him.

"No," James responded, still shaking with laughter as he pressed himself along Severus' front. "I like it. I think I'm going to keep doing it."

"You are an insufferable and uncaring ass," Severus spat, giving James another weak push as he just shook and laughed a little harder against him. "No biting," Severus added, aware of how pathetic it sounded to keep bargaining with James even after he had ignored him the first time.

"Hm." James hummed, placing a chaste kiss to Severus ear that still had the effect of making the Slytherin boy jolt and stand up a little straighter. "I don't know. It was pretty fun. Your reaction was good."

"It was childish." Severus drawled, leaning away from James' questing mouth. "Children bite. I would ask if you are a child, but I think we both know the answer to that question."

"I'll make it up to you," James murmured against Severus' neck. His voice was so deep and husky, his breath gusting against the exposed and sensitive skin of Severus' neck, that the Slytherin student couldn't suppress a shudder. He quickly covered it up with a hard shake of his hair.

James leaned back, scrunching up his face in distaste and sticking out his tongue indicating that he had got some of Severus' hair in his mouth.

After he had got over his ordeal, James frowned at Severus in determination and repeated, "I'll make it up to you. For today and before."

Severus wasn't sure what kind of expression he gave James, but if he had to guess, he probably would have put his money on 'harried'.

In a movement that looked effortless from where Severus was standing, James went to his knees in front of him. He reached up and undid Severus' belt with a few easy tugs and then was popping open the button on his pants and pulling down his fly before Severus' brain had caught up with the implications.

Severus bit down on the inside of his cheek as James pulled him out of his pants. The late fall air was cold on his dick, a sharp contrast to James' warm damp palm.

Part of Severus was yelling at him that something was weird, something had changed. James had

never done more than jerk him off before and that was when he was feeling especially generous. The last time they had encountered each other, they had sucked each other off. Now, James was kneeling in front of him and working him in his hand while he licked his lips. Unless Severus was somehow severely mistaken, James meant to give him a blowjob.

*'Perhaps he realized last time that he rather likes sucking cock.'* Severus thought somewhat deliriously as James leaned in and licked languorously at his head. *'Which is surprisingly homosexual of him, but could potentially explain a lot. Such as the general situation we now find ourselves in.'*

Severus had to drop that train of thought as James went from firmly tonguing his glans to steadily sucking Severus deeper and deeper into his mouth.

Reaching out, Severus steadied himself by pressing the palms of his hands to the tree behind him. James was being loud, wet sucking noises and sloppy licks that sounded especially loud in the still quiet forest. The sounds by themselves made Severus' whole face turn a steady embarrassed red. The actual sight of James Potter hungrily swallowing his cock made Severus' blood rush in the opposite direction for entirely different reasons.

Severus had already been half hard when James had started in on him and he knew it probably wouldn't be long before he finished. James was working him over especially hard, though he supposed it couldn't be very expertly. He winced a few times as the head of his dick scratched against teeth. He could also tell that James couldn't take him very deep. He kept one fist locked tightly around the base of his dick. James' other hand seemed to be moving stealthily between his legs.

Soon, his breath was coming faster. Severus found he couldn't stop his hips from twitching toward James' mouth in rhythm with the bobs of the Gryffindor boy's head. James seemed to appreciate the movement and hummed in approval, adding another sensation to all the other ones Severus didn't think he'd ever experience in regards to his dick.

As Severus got closer to his orgasm, he became aware that he was making sounds. Small breathy moans and mewls with each exhale. He knew he should hold the sounds in, but barely had enough wits about him to realize he was making the sounds in the first place

Severus curled forward, his building orgasm bending him over like hurricane winds bend ancient trees. He had a hand hovering over James' head, halfway to threading his fingers through James' messy hair, before he caught himself. He grimaced at the strength of will it took to curl his fingers toward his palm and move his hand away.

Severus wasn't sure how long he was like that, on the verge of coming but without that last additional stimulus that would put him over. But, he would remember what put him over the edge.

James' movements were becoming somewhat erratic. He was starting to lose his rhythm, desperately trying everything that had drawn a reaction from Severus. On one downward movement, he loosened his fist and allowed Snape's dick to touch the back of his throat. As it did so, his throat jumped and he swallowed desperately against the intrusion.

The flutter of James' throat against the head of his dick was so new and the thought itself was so erotic, that Severus' orgasm rolled over him like a freight train. His muscles spasmed, his vision went blurry and he was sure he lost a minute or so during.

When his vision came swimming back and his breathing finally started to even out, Severus realized he had both of his hands tangled in James' hair. He was bent almost double over the boy

kneeling in front of him and his knees were shaking dangerously.

Using the tree as a prop, Severus slowly straightened up and allowed himself to slide down the tree until he was sitting his his legs splayed out and a smug looking James between them.

James looked properly sexed up himself. His hair was a ridiculous mess, his pupils were blown wide and his lips where he licked at them were swollen and wet. His color was high on his cheeks and he still had the palm of one hand pressed to his crotch.

With a slight shock, Severus realized that there was no erection that he could see in James' pants. Though, he thought he saw a dark patch against the front.

"I've never heard you make sounds like that before," James said, once he appeared to sufficiently catch his breath. His voice, when he spoke, sounded absolutely wrecked. It was raspy and deep, a mix of lust and a sore throat.

"You never sucked me off before," Severus replied without thought.

James barked out a laugh and leaned forward to press his face into the space between Snape's neck and shoulder. "How foolish of me," James laughed.

Severus tucked his dick back into his pants, the cold night harsh against every bare inch of skin it could reach. James was a warm weight on his chest, seeping through his clothes and into his skin.

Coming to a sudden realization in the quiet, Severus exclaimed, "You didn't swallow, did you?"

James just laughed, sounding sated and content, like a languorous cat. "Course I did. I'm not so ungrateful as to spit it out on the floor," James replied with a pointed poke at Severus' ribs.

Severus smacked his hand away.

"That's foul," he muttered after a pause.

James huffed a laugh into his collarbone.

Time passed and Severus started to become uncomfortable as the afterglow slowly faded.

"I'm going to count this," Severus said quietly into the silence. "Ninety."

James went stiff where he was pressed against him, but didn't say anything. Severus would have very much liked to have seen James expression, but he kept his face firmly planted against him.

"Fine, whatever," Severus heard him mumble into the thick fabric of his cloak.

In his chest, Severus felt a twinge like guilt. He felt guilty about letting James Potter suck his dick and then tell him he was going to count it toward his bet. It was ridiculous. James Potter more than owed him a blowjob for all the mean and petty things he had done to Severus over the course of their bet. But, Severus felt that way all the same.

Not that he was going to let such a ridiculous feeling prevent him from sane action.

His mouth cut into a firm line, Severus slowly extricated himself from under James and stood up. James stood, as well, wearing a strange and unreadable expression. Severus might have thought it was a resting expression, but knew full well that James didn't really have such a thing. He was always making one expression or another. This strange absence of expression looked odd on him.

Severus looked up into the cloudy sky, but there was still no hint of moon or star light. He had no way of knowing how long the two of them had been out there, but he doubted it had been long.

"We better go back inside, before we break curfew," Severus said, anyway.

"Sure," James agreed, none of the usual boisterous sound in his reply. He started walking back toward the treeline without a backward glance at Severus.

Severus watched him go for a while, his finely made cloak swirling around his feet and stirring up leaves as he walked. Snape pulled his own patched wooly cloak closer and followed behind him.

The two walked silently back to the castle and parted once inside without a word. Despite the fires roaring in every hearth, Severus still felt cold that night.

## Ninety-one

The first snow of the season was still freshly draped over most of Hogsmeade on the student's first visit of the year. Sweet smelling wood smoke rose lazily from the crooked chimneys of the crouched houses and leaning store fronts. Trodden mush was pushed along the edges of the cobblestone roads and steam and frost fought for dominance on every window.

Severus had a scratchy wool scarf that his mother had sent him a few weeks ago wrapped around his neck and mouth. The wool was cheap and lumpy, the color varying from a swampy green to a pale brown in different parts. It was obviously hand knit, if the knots and holes interspersed throughout were anything to go from. Severus loved it.

Hot steam from his own breath wafted up over his face with each exhale. A hand full of Gryffindors and a few Ravenclaws made disparaging comments about his scarf and patched heavy cloak as he walked by, but the insults rolled right off of him. The day was bright and brisk and he was looking forward to finally getting out of the castle for a little while. Besides, If he let every unkind comment bother him, Severus wouldn't have been able to drag himself out of bed in the morning.

Snape's firm forward stride stuttered in front of a bustling quill and parchment shop. Propped up in the large front window was a dark polished wooden case with deep red velvet lining. Nestled in the velvet cloth was a set of three beautiful quills. They looked like raven feathers, large firm pinions carefully chosen from among the usually small feathers of the dark bird.

Severus started to move toward the glass, dodging around students and villagers walking up and down the street. He stopped in front of the window, leaning close enough that the glass started to fog up near his mouth.

There was a small piece of paper folded in half and propped up in front of the box of beautiful quills. The price declared on the paper was so astronomical that Severus was sure that even if he saved up all the money he made from doing the homework of other Slytherins for a year he wouldn't have enough to buy them.

The buoyancy Severus had been feeling that day left him in a small huff. He felt a little heavier as he frowned down at the quills one more time before walking away and back toward his original destination.

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A short while later found Severus relishing the last few bites of a hot roast beef and swiss sandwich.

He sat in his usual spot in a small square off the center of Hogsmeade. When it was warmer, there was a pretty fountain that spit water into a circular pond filled with flowering water plants. Since it was cold, however, the fountain and pond were empty.

Severus sat against the wall of an old cottage on a stone bench. It was shady there, a few degrees colder than it had been when he was walking in the sun.

The sandwich was delicious, as it usually was. The bread was tough and crusty on the outside and soft on the inside. The beef was juicy and the swiss was sharp and nutty. Best of all, it was cheap.

Snape liked the food at Hogwarts, but it was really rich. Everything was cooked in a thick gravy or drizzled in a sugar glaze. It was delicious, but he wasn't used to it, even after years of eating it. He always looked forward to getting a simpler meal while in Hogsmeade.

Wiping his mouth on the back of his hand, Severus moved to wrap his lumpy green scarf back around his neck. The sandwich had cheered him up a little after the initial disappointment of the beautiful raven quill set. He now felt up to doing the small amount of shopping he still intended to do. He needed a few cheap rolls of parchment paper, a few wells of plain ink, and maybe some pairs of socks if he could find any reasonably priced. Most of his were too thin to provide him much warmth in the coming cold months.

Severus stood up and started to walk toward the exit from the small square and nearly walked squarely into James Potter.

"Snape!" James exclaimed with a grin. "You're a hard man to find."

Severus stepped back quickly and glanced around behind James. He could see a few young looking Hogwarts students walking down one of the bigger thoroughfares behind James, but there was no sign of his usual band of cronies.

"I'm surprised you're not with your friends. I would think they wouldn't know which end was up without you," Severus droned, trying to step around James and doing his best to ignore the implication that James was looking for him.

James pointedly stepped to the side and blocked Severus' escape. Their chests bumped together and Snape stepped back again with a bit off sound of frustration.

"I told them that I'm buying them their Christmas presents and they latched onto the idea. So, we all split up," James explained with a wolfish grin, obviously pleased with himself.

"And, are you buying them their Christmas presents?" Severus asked, already sure of the answer.

"Of course not," James replied gleefully.

"Of course not," Severus agreed dryly. "Very nice. Well, then, I must be going."

"Wait! Just a moment," James said quickly, pressing a hand against Severus' chest. Severus looked

down at the hand, then up at James with a look of disdain.

James smiled widely and then began to rifle in the paper shopping bag he was holding in his other hand. After a moment, he withdrew a square package wrapped in shiny red wrapping paper and tied with a glittering gold ribbon. James held it in front of him and leaned forward toward Severus with an expectant look.

Severus frowned down at the package for a long moment and then looked up at James with a questioning look.

"I thought you said you're not buying Christmas presents?" Severus asked slowly, keeping one suspicious eye on the garishly wrapped present in James' hands.

"Not for them," James replied shortly with another mischievous grin.

"Who is it for, then?" Severus asked.

James grin dropped into a grimace of what, Severus supposed, was disgust. His nose even wrinkled as if he smelled something bad.

"You're not this dumb, right?" James asked, leaning back. "I mean, this is a bit or something, right?"

Severus pointed an accusing finger at the present and glared at James, anger and hurt pride flaring bright in his chest.

"Obviously you didn't buy me a *Christmas* present of all things," Severus spat. "Why would you, James Potter, bane of my existence, buy me a present? I would think that you would sooner break out in hives than do something nice for me."

James huffed an impatient breath, his grimace of distaste having faded off while Severus bewailed him. "I'm nice to you all the time," James responded crossly.

Severus stared at him in silence, aware that he was frozen pointing at the dubious package still resting in James' hands. James raised a confused eyebrow in his direction.

"You're not serious," Severus said, more than asked. But, he carefully watched James' expression and was further lost at sea to only see genuine confusion and dislike.

"Just take the stupid present," James sighed, apparently done with Severus' currently line of questioning.

"Absolutely not," Severus answered quickly. "Also, you are completely deluded." Which was just another terrible personality flaw that Severus could add to the long list of them he had found James Potter to possess.

"Why not?" James snapped angrily.

"Obviously, the package is cursed or contains something offensive," Severus responded flatly before adding, "I like how you don't care at all that I honestly believe you to be mentally twisted."

"You are so distrustful," James laughed, flashing bright white teeth. "There's nothing bad in it or cast on it. Just open it!" James exclaimed, pushing the package against Severus' chest. Severus was forced to take the package lest it fall to the ground at his feet.

The package looked even more garish against his fraying fingerless gloves and the dirty cuffs of his robe. Severus stared down at the package in despair.

"Just open it," James repeated when Severus just continued to stare morosely at the package in his hands.

"No," Severus responded shortly. He tried to hand the package back, but James just pushed it back into his chest.

"Would you open it if I told you what was in it?" James asked in what Severus could only assume was a faux gentle voice.

"No," Severus repeated with more force, trying again to hand the package back to James only to have it pushed back into his hands.

"They are a set of ultra rare raven feather quills. Three of them," James replied with relish, as if Severus had replied in the affirmative.

Severus found himself struck speechless for the second time in as many minutes. He looked down at the brightly shining package in his hands again and had to struggle to swallow around his suddenly dry throat.

"Why-?" Severus croaked, shutting his mouth with a click of teeth at the deplorably weak sound of his own voice.

James looked to visibly fluff and preen at the reaction his present had evoked, even unopened.

"You were looking at them, right?" he asked with a wide smile. "I saw you. You obviously wanted them, but you're far too poor to ever be able to afford them. I mean, it's not that much to me, but it must be worth years of allowance for you."

Severus wanted to point out that he had never received any such thing as an allowance, but things were starting to click into place, so he let James continue.

"I thought, you know, it's Christmas soon and I have so much and you have so little. Why not spread the good cheer around! Or, at least, the money. Besides, you're probably one of the only people in school who will actually get all the possible use out of these things and not just display them or something stupid like that," James continued, looking so proud of himself by the end of his diatribe that Severus might have thought he just won the Quidditch World Cup.

*'Ah,' Severus thought to himself as he stared blankly at James' self-satisfied expression. 'It's a show of power. He's showing me how easy it is for him to get the things that I want. How much better he is than me.'*

Severus sighed heavily and held the package back out to James. This time, James just looked down at the package being thrust toward his chest with confusion.

"I don't want it," Severus said as plainly as he could. "Give them to someone else."

James' thick brows came down over his dark eyes and he looked at Severus with a thunderous expression, dark clouds on the horizon.

"I didn't buy them for anyone else," he said sharply, pushing the wrapped box back at Snape. The box's edges hit Severus' bony chest with a sharp stab of pain. James kept a hand on the box, holding it against Snape's chest. "I bought them for you. You could be grateful and just take

them," James snarled.

Severus flinched at the feeling of the sharp corners of the box digging into his chest, but covered it with a quick grab of the box and two quick steps back from the quickly enraged James Potter.

He kept his face tilted down, his eyes looked doubtfully at the prettily wrapped present in his hands. "Why don't you give them to Lily?" he asked in a small voice, rubbing a finger over the glossy wrapping paper. "She'd love them," he added. He would love to be able to give them to her. Not that he ever could. But, maybe, through James...

"Lily wouldn't appreciate them!" James exclaimed, his anger obviously still lingering even after Severus gave ground. "You're not hearing what I'm telling you," James bit out through his teeth.

"She's always using cheap throwaway quills," Severus added. "She needs a good set. She would appreciate them."

James snorted, his mouth crinkling into an ugly smile. "She wouldn't appreciate them. She would probably just gripe at me for getting a 'dreary color' or something stupid like that."

"Raven feathers big enough and well plucked enough to make a quill are rare- " Severus started to respond.

"She doesn't know that," James was quick to interject.

"She's muggle born. She won't know everything you know about the wizarding world," Severus said with a frown. He couldn't fathom why he was explaining things like this to James Potter.

If James' grimace of distaste was anything to go by, neither did he. At what point did Severus become the advocate for fair treatment of mudbloods?

"Take the present, or I'll just throw it away," James sighed after the two of them had stood staring at each other for long enough.

"Give it to Lily," Severus insisted, hugging the present to his chest and hearing the paper crinkle as he did so.

"I'll throw it away," James insisted back.

Severus frowned at James and James glared back. Behind James, a young girl shrieked in delighted laughter and the patter of a group of feet across the wet flagstone street could be heard. A startling reminder that the rest of the town was churning outside of their small seemingly insulated conversation.

"I'll throw it away," James repeated, this time with finality, as he stepped forward with a hand out to take the box back.

Severus jerked away from him before he could stop himself.

A small smile tugged at the corner of James' mouth and an expression of, maybe, relief flashed across his face. "You like it," James sighed.

"You like it," James repeated louder, smiling lopsidedly at Severus. "Just keep it. You don't have to be so contrary about everything, you know."

"I do have some pride," Severus replied and he sounded petulant even to his own ears. "I can't take

such an exorbitant gift. Especially from you," he sneered.

James rolled his eyes, but replied with a grin, "Well, it's not as if I wasn't going to ask for something in return."

Severus felt the bottom drop out of his stomach as he anticipated what was to come. But, like a moth to a flame, he felt helpless to resist the draw.

"What's that?" Severus asked crossly.

With a lascivious grin, James stepped close to Severus and whispered in his ear, "I want you to suck my dick and then let me fuck you against a wall."

"Of course you do," Severus sighed, backing cautiously away from James and rolling his eyes.

"It would be in your best interest," James said slowly, stepping forward as Severus hesitantly stepped back. "Think about it. I don't want my purchase to go to waste and you don't want to accept charity from me," James sneered.

"This way," the Gryffindor continued, "it would just be like a trade. Goods for services. You'll be able to, like, have your cake and eat it too!" James exclaimed with a grin that showed too many teeth.

Severus arched a doubtful eyebrow at James, both at his reasoning and his turn of phrase.

"I don't think I quite want these quills that much," Severus spoke slowly, keeping a careful eye on James, who was still steadily advancing on him.

"It will count toward the bet, too, of course," James sniffed. He looked displeased to have to add it to his argument, but continued on anyway. "It will be another notch to add to your steadily marked up bed frame," Severus growled warningly, but James ignored him. "We're getting close to the end of the bet, aren't we?"

James arched an eyebrow and Severus stopped his slow retreat. He squeezed the box a little tighter to his chest. His hands were starting to sweat against the glossy wrapping paper.

"Someone will see us," Severus mumbled, one last token argument in a losing fight.

With a negligent flick of his wand, James cast a privacy charm. Everything more than three feet away from them grew three shades darker, as if the world around them was covered in thick grey cellophane.

Severus frowned at James. "Where did you learn that spell?" he grumbled, more than a little miffed that he didn't recognize the incantation, even if the wand movement was familiar.

"A wizard has to have his secrets," James responded with a wag of his eyebrows.

Severus sighed in annoyance, but allowed himself to be hauled by his arm out of the still brightly lit little square and into a nearby narrow alleyway. It appeared to be the thin space occupied between some kind of small cafe and someone's cottage. The cafe had a garbage can overflowing with coffee grounds and soggy used teabags.

James came to a stop a few feet short of the overfilled garbage can and pulled Severus with him so that the Slytherin's back was pressed against the cold damp brick wall. Severus fumbled with half numb fingers to shove the showy package into his school bag, the shining red paper slippery

against his palms, before letting the bag drop to the ground beside him.

He glanced toward the mouth of the alleyway to his left, Severus' eyebrows crumpling in worry. Even darkened by the privacy charm, the street beyond the dingy alley looked bright and the voices beyond loud and boisterous. He felt sure in that moment that someone would notice them and then he would just absolutely have to die of the shame and embarrassment. There was no other option.

James was oblivious to his inner turmoil, pressing his chest against Severus' and mouthing at his neck. His kisses were more teeth than lips, sharp stinging bites that felt like they were begging for Severus' attention.

Severus gave James a solid shove, sending him a few steps back. "This is stupid," he mumbled, running his hands through his hair.

"It's not stupid," James growled, quickly stepping back up to Severus. "It's brilliant," he said with a toothy smile as he pulled Severus' hands from his own hair and began to pull his gloves off one at a time.

"Just crouch down," he added when Severus aimed an unimpressed glare at him. "You'll be behind the trashcan and nobody will be able to see you."

Severus frowned at the dirty trash can. It was disgusting and didn't smell very nice, but luckily the cold had stuffed Severus' nose up a little bit, so he wasn't able to enjoy its full bouquet of aroma.

It was a disgusting prospect, but James wasn't wrong. It was big enough that if he knelt beside it, nobody would be able to see him from the nearby busy street.

With the bare minimum amount of grumbling, Severus knelt down on his knees in the dirty alleyway. He folded his legs underneath him, the soles of his feet touching the crumbling brick wall behind him. The damp wetness of the paved alley seeped into his trousers, sending a cold chill up his thighs.

Severus frowned up at James, but he was already fumbling with his belt and fly, his usually deft fingers clumsy against the button of his pants.

"Fuck, yes," James breathed, staring down at Snape hungrily even as he struggled with his own pants. "Stay just like that," James added once he finally pulled his already hard dick out of his pants.

Severus frowned past James' dick up at his face before looking back at the appendage that was becoming so unfortunately familiar to him. He sometimes wondered if James walked around with his dick permanently hard, considering that Snape never got to see it flaccid except for after he had seen to its satisfaction personally. But, he discarded the theory as too preposterous, even though it did make something of an interesting picture in his mind.

James tangled his fingers in Severus' hair before using his hold to push his head back. He had his other hand wrapped firmly around the base of his own dick. Severus watched him squeeze his blunt fingers around his cock once and then a second time.

He tapped the head of his cock against Severus' mouth. It was either a warning or a question. Severus decided to take it as the latter, flicking his tongue out to taste the tip of James' dick. His tongue returned to his mouth with a dollop of precum, salty and with that vague coppery taste that was becoming familiar.

James' breathing hitched audibly and Severus glanced up at him with James' dick still resting on his bottom lip.

"I want to fuck your mouth," James rushed out in one breath.

"I thought you wanted a blow job," Severus responded, arching an eyebrow up at James. "And, then to fuck me. Or, has the plan changed?"

James made an incoherent sound, rocking his hips against Severus' mouth. Severus pursed his lips and let his head move back with the movement, not allowing James to push inside his mouth.

James sighed heavily. "Semantics," he spat. "Let me fuck your mouth."

Severus's frown deepened and he turned his face to the side. James let him, removing his hand from his hair.

"I don't trust you not to choke me with your stupid cock," Severus snapped at him. It was quite true. Blow jobs were one thing. Letting someone hold you still and shove their cock down your throat was quite another.

"I won't choke you," James bit out.

"What part of 'I don't trust you' -" Severus started to ask him, before James quickly interrupted him.

"If I go too deep just pinch me," James said. Severus huffed a disbelieving laugh. "Or, just bite me! If you pinch me and I don't back off, it won't even be your fault, right? I wasn't listening to you."

Severus frowned up at James. He was quiet for a long moment while James continued to squeeze his dick with thick inexpert fingers.

"Do you promise?" he asked slowly, distrust and fear and maybe even a small amount of excitement pounding in his heart.

"Fuck, yes! I promise!" James burst out before he reached behind Severus' head to nudge him toward his visibly twitching cock. "Now, will you please let me fuck your mouth?"

Severus sighed and resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "Fine," he breathed, watching James' dick twitch at the sensation of his breath.

Severus settled his hands on the fronts of James' thighs, leverage to push him away in case it became too much. He then straightened his back and leaned forward, licking the head once more before letting it push past his lips.

"Gods, yes," James sighed, pressing the hand still on the back of Severus' head forward until Severus' lips touched the hand he still had wrapped around his cock.

Severus swirled his tongue and sucked a few times, experimentally. Then, he moved to pull back and begin bobbing his head, but James' hand held him firmly in place. As soon as he realized that, a throb of pleasure went straight to his own dick, already half hard. Before he could stop it, a small noise scratched its way up out of the back of his throat.

James let Severus come up, gasping somewhat more than was necessary for how long he had held him down.

"You like that," James stated. His voice sounded gravelly, strangled.

"No," Severus said quickly. He realized immediately that he had said it too quickly. It sounded too much like a denial without substance.

Severus felt blood leap to his cheeks, but didn't allow his eyes to lower from James' dancing gray ones.

"Good," James replied.

He shifted his stance, removing the hand from his cock and moving it to brace against the brick wall at Severus' back. He tangled his remaining hand in the long hair at the back of Severus' head before slowly pushing him forward inexorably toward his spit slick dick.

Severus pushed back against the hand at the back of his head, testing James' strength. He was strong and Severus' halfhearted attempts to resist only slowed his progress.

When Severus reached James' dick again, he opened his mouth. He licked the head, let it slid along his tongue toward the back of his throat. He could feel his own cock hardening in his pants, reacting in a way that it hadn't the last time he had James' cock in his mouth.

James' dick touched the back of Severus' throat and he gagged loudly, pushing back against James' thighs until his mouth was free. Tears sprang to the corners of his eyes and his mouth flooded with saliva.

Severus heard a quiet 'fuck' above him as he gasped for air before James was pushing him forward again. He was loathe to really saying anything either. Whatever was happening to him was strange and little scary, but mostly it just felt confusing and exhilarating.

When James pushed him forward on his dick, he didn't let go when Severus gagged this time. He just stopped and held him still until Severus got his gag reflex under control. It was only then that James eased him off.

Severus' right hand found its way down to the front of his pants. He pressed the heel of his palm to the hard length of his own dick and hoped that James didn't notice.

They began to find a rhythm. James would push Severus down on his dick, down, down, down until Severus gagged. Then, he would hold him there for however long it took Severus to find a way to handle it, then he would pull him back and Severus would bob his head a few times on his dick. Then, James would start to push him again, down farther and farther on his dick until he couldn't handle it any more.

It only took a few repetitions of this for Severus to realize he might come before James. His dick was painfully hard still done up fully in his pants. He couldn't move his hand up and down on himself any longer for fear he would come virtually untouched. He kept his palm pressed to himself, exerting pressure every now and then, but nothing else.

James kept pushing deeper every time. Severus' throat was beginning to feel sore, even a little swollen. But, he didn't pay it any mind. It almost felt like every throb of James' dick in Severus' mouth went straight to his own dick. A direct mouth to cock connection.

Above him, James shifted positions again, bracing his forehead on the brick wall and bringing his other hand down to brace on the side of Severus' face.

He pushed Severus back, tilted his head up so that he was looking up at him. Severus couldn't

imagine what he looked like. He knew that his hair was probably a mess from James tangling his fingers in it, pulling him around by it. He could feel tears prickling his eyes and was excessively aware of the wetness on his swollen lips. He tried to swallow around the dryness in his throat, but was only able to produce a dry clicking noise.

“Okay,” James breathed, appearing to be talking mostly to himself. He brushed his hand against the side of Severus’ face, pushing hair away from his feverish forehead, before repeating to himself, “Okay.”

He stared at Severus for a short while before looking past his face at what Severus assumed had to be his pretty impressively tented pants.

James’ mouth quirked up in one corner. “Take your dick out,” he rasped.

“No,” Severus croaked, surprised at how terrible his own voice sounded.

“If you don’t, you’re just going to mess your pants. And, cleaning spells won’t be able to completely remove it,” James added with a mischievous grin.

Severus frowned, but knew that James was right. Besides, further argument would only strain his poor throat. Not to mention that his dick would surely thank him for the freedom.

With fumbling fingers that Severus blamed on the cold, he undid the front of his pants. When his dick was finally freed, he sighed at the intense feeling of relief.

“Good,” James said, watching Severus and sounding as if his own voice was suffering just the slightest bit.

With one hand still on the side of his face and the other on the nape of Severus’ neck, James started to urge Severus forward again.

Severus swallowed a small needy sound originating in the back of his throat as his mouth met with James’ cock. He readied himself for the same heavenly rhythm James had set up before. But, it was different this time.

This time, when Severus gagged, James didn’t stop pushing. Tears that had dried during the short break sprung fresh to Severus’ eyes and his hands spasmed on James’ legs. But, before he could remember to pinch him, James pulled back on his own, freeing Severus to cough and gasp for air.

“Good,” James breathed, petting him with a trembling hand still on the side of Severus’ face.

“You’re doing good,” James said again, before pushing forward again before Severus could protest.

He pressed forward, against the tight ring of Severus’ throat even as he gagged and his throat spasmed. saliva filled his mouth and this time he did remember to pinch.

Severus’ pulled in a gasp of breath before rasping out, “Stop!”

“You’re doing so good! You’re almost there,” James responded.

Severus could feel James’ hands trembling where they rested on his head and could see the connecting string of spit from his bottom lip to the tip of James’ dick. His own dick was throbbing in his hand, so incredibly hard even though James hadn’t touched it once.

“What-” Severus started to ask, only to have James take that exact moment as the opportunity to

push inside his mouth again. Severus tried to protest with a muffled “Mmm!”, but it was halfhearted at best.

James pushed deep into his throat. Severus’ throat spasmed around the intrusion, but he fought to control it. He believed he might understand what James was trying to do. It was scary. Terrifying. But, obviously his dick liked it. So, for once in his life, he would listen to it instead of his head.

James kept pushing and Severus breathed through his nose, tears streaming down his face. Severus was getting ready to pinch again, it was too much, he was starting to feel light headed and his throat hurt. When, suddenly, something gave and James slipped past the tight ring of Severus’ throat.

James and Severus both made an embarrassing noise: James one of obvious pleasure, Severus one of surprise.

Severus had never felt anything quite like it. It felt a little bit like choking or trying to swallow an ice cube whole. He couldn’t breathe at all as James rocked carefully forward and backward. Severus pinched him.

James pulled back like it was physically painful. Severus gasped in a breath. The hand on his dick was wet just like his cheeks. He was going to come. He was going to come from getting fucked in the mouth. He could barely wrap his head around that idea, but he couldn’t bring himself to stop either.

Brushing a hand across the tear track on his cheek, James moved forward after it appeared the Severus had caught his breath.

“Again?” he asked.

Severus didn’t trust his voice, so he just nodded.

Severus opened his mouth, ready when James pushed in. James pressed forward slowly and didn’t meet nearly as much resistance as the first time. He slipped past the ring of muscle and reached the back of Severus’ throat with a shivery sigh.

“Fuck, Sev,” James grunted. He was holding on Severus’ head tight and rocking back and forth. Severus’ hand was tight on his cock, moving fast, up and down, over and over, his orgasm building as quickly as his lack of oxygen.

“Fuck, I’m gonna come,” James muttered a second before Severus felt his dick twitch hard and something strange hit the back of his throat.

Severus moaned, drawing a complimentary groan from James at the feeling Severus’ voice had on his dick. The Slytherin student’s own dick jerked and he came hard into his own hand even as he felt James continue to rock back and forth in his throat.

When James finally pulled back, Severus had to struggle to get breath and keep his balance. He fell backward against the brick wall at his back. James’ hands went to his head and shoulders as if to steady him.

His vision was swimming. He supposed that was from the lack of oxygen. Also, he noted that he didn’t taste any semen at all. It all must have gone straight down his throat, bypassing his tongue entirely. The thought made Severus shiver and not from the cold, though that feeling was starting to dawn on him too.

James took a heavy seat beside him. He tucked his cock away and then did up his pants. After a moment of contemplating the devastated look on Severus' face, he did the same for him.

"How do you feel?" James asked after what he judged to be an appropriate amount of time.

Severus opened his mouth to reply, but all that came out was a sharp croak. The rest of the air reserved for his reply breathed out without any sound.

James winced in sympathy, but was quick to turn it into a leering smile. "That good, huh?"

Severus was tired and cold, his throat was sore, he had apparently lost his voice, and had just found out that he got off on having his mouth fucked. But, he was still more than well enough to flip James Potter the bird.

## Ninety-Two

When classes let out for the afternoon, the halls of Hogwarts became a stampede of children of various ages. First years ducked under the flailing arms of sixth years, while seventh years moved in large roving packs. The last class of the day meant that the tides of students became unpredictable. Some people wanted to visit a teacher in their office, some wanted to drop their things off in their common room, some made a beeline straight for the dining hall, and still others met in small corners for secret rendezvous.

James Potter and his friends had chosen to loiter in one of the courtyards still milling with students. They were loud and raucous, their shouted jokes and echoing laughter drowning out any nearby conversations. Students made wide circles around them as they tried to bypass the group of rowdy Gryffindors to get to their varied destinations.

Severus stood in the shadow of a doorway. He had just come out of the Advanced Arithmancy classroom and had stopped to watch James and his friends warily. He only needed to take a left and follow the spiral staircase down into the dungeons and the potions classroom to avoid the loud disturbance of his enthusiastic classmates. Under normal circumstances, he would have done exactly that. But, a peculiar thought had been milling in his head for the past few weeks.

Severus Snape's bet with James Potter would inevitably come to a close. But, ever since their encounter at Hogsmeade, Potter had kept a strange orbit around the reclusive Slytherin student. He would come just close enough to shout a joke at him or maybe jeer across a hallway. Sometimes, he would pass just close enough to wink suggestively without any of their classmates noticing. But, just as quickly as he swung past, he would pass out of Snape's orbit again.

If Snape didn't know better, he would think that James Potter was avoiding him. Or, maybe, avoiding him while trying to seem like he wasn't avoiding him.

Lacking any better explanation for James' strange actions of late, Severus had decided that avoidance had to be the reason. And, the only reason Severus could imagine for Potter to avoid him was the impending conclusion of their bet.

Severus could admit even to himself that he had mixed feelings in regards to the same, though he

couldn't exactly put his finger on why.

James Potter was still a terrible beast of a boy, but he seemed less overwhelming to Severus than he did prior to their bet due to their constant interactions. The Gryffindor, who once seemed larger than life when he was tormenting and teasing Snape on a daily basis, was now reduced down to his composite flaws.

Severus was a big enough man to admit that the sex was getting exponentially better too. The first half, maybe even the first two thirds, of their encounters had been nearly unbearable. But, lately, they had been strangely pleasurable. Sometimes Severus even found himself looking forward to them! Which he never could have anticipated when their ill informed bet first started.

All this being said, Severus was fully aware that the bet was stupid and immature. Maybe even a little bit mentally unbalanced in just how far they had taken it.

Severus didn't dare to believe that James would keep his end of the bargain when it was finally done. But, he could hope.

Whatever the case, Severus fully believed it to be in his best interest to end their bargain as soon as possible. It was an added incentive that James seemed opposed to this.

Mustering his courage, Severus dodged around the flow of students moving across the courtyard and approached James from behind. The Gryffindor students standing to James' left and right noticed him before James. Their silence was what prompted Potter to look behind.

"Whoah, Snape!" James exclaimed with faux surprise, doing a little hop while clutching at his cloak over his heart. "Don't sneak up on me like that! I thought I was being stalked by a vampire for a second there."

"Snivellus?" a familiar voice sneered from over James' shoulder. Severus mentally firmed his resolve in the face of Sirius Black's glittering black eyes.

"Did you come to pick a fight or something?" Sirius asked, his mouth spreading open into an excited grin. "Please tell me you're here to teach me a lesson," he added, pulling his wand from his pocket. "I so enjoy it when you try to look smart."

"Sirius," a bored sigh came from somewhere behind James and Sirius. Severus assumed it belonged to Remus.

"I need to talk to you," Severus said, firmly ignoring Sirius, keeping his eyes firmly on James' somewhat strained friendly expression.

A small quirk of James' eyebrow was the only indication that he was thrown off by what Severus had said.

"Do you need advice on how to style your hair?" Sirius asked while leaning obnoxiously on James' shoulder. "Because, my first tip would be to wash it," Sirius smirked as his quip resulted in uproarious laughter from the gathered group of Gryffindors.

"Ah," James waffled when Severus remained unmoved by Sirius' taunting, standing his ground and staring James down. "I'm kind of busy," James landed on.

Severus raised an imperious eyebrow. "You certainly look very busy."

James frowned deeply for a brief moment before Sirius stepped forward protectively blocking the

Gryffindor from view.

"Hey," Sirius said sharply, his usually friendly face twisting itself into a defensive snarl. "You can fuck right off, Snivellus."

"I'm not talking to you, Black," Snape snapped back just as sharply.

"Guys!" James yelled, raising his voice over the two dark haired boys currently snarling at each other from either side of him. "It's fine," he continued, turning to Sirius and patting his shoulder in commiseration. "I'll see what Snape wants and meet you guys at the Great Hall later, yeah?"

Sirius appeared to visibly struggle with the idea of backing down from a fight with Snape, even at his de facto leader's insistence. But, after a protracted moment of staring at James and James giving nothing back, he huffed an angry "Fine, whatever," and looked away.

James didn't waste a moment after getting Sirius acquiescence. He grabbed Severus by his elbow and dragged him quickly out of the courtyard and into a nearby mostly empty hall.

Coming to an abrupt stop, James whipped around to glare at Severus. His shoulders were up and his brows turned sharply down.

"What was that about?" he whispered harshly, while gesturing vaguely toward the sunny courtyard.

Severus threw James another extremely unimpressed look, before walking casually around him and continuing down the shadowed hall. "You've been avoiding me," he threw over his shoulder at the Gryffindor angrily following him.

James snorted in derision. "Is that how every conversation with us is going to start?" he asked rhetorically. "You're avoiding me, I'm avoiding you. Did you ever think that maybe we might be allowed to not want to see each other?"

"You might not want to see me, but I wanted to see you. So, I ignored you're not so subtle attempts to avoid me and came to get you," Snape explained in the same tone of voice he might explain why you don't eat worms to a five year old.

Severus heard James' steps falter behind him, so he slowed to a stop as well. The light wasn't particularly good in the hallway they were currently standing in, but what Severus could see of James' expression was strange.

"You wanted to see me?" James asked in an oddly choked voice.

Severus frowned at him, confused by his sudden change in attitude. "No," Severus said slowly. "My body has been taken over by Nearly Headless Nick and I can no longer control my actions," Severus snarked. "Did I not say I needed to speak to you? You're very strange."

Turning around quickly, Severus began his steady forward march again. Not because he was so confident that James would follow him. It was more due to his own confused expression that he preferred to keep to himself.

James coughed loudly into his fist before hurrying to catch up to the Slytherin student. "I'm not strange, just touched, is all!" James exclaimed. "Severus Snape actually wanted to spend time with me, James Potter! Soon the world will stop turning and Dumbledore will take up a life of llama farming."

Severus sighed heavily, but decided not to argue with James as to how likely he thought it was that

Professor Dumbledore may one day wake up and suddenly decide it was his calling to raise and care for llamas instead of young magical children. (Severus thought it was actually quite likely, given their headmaster's proclivity for strange whims.)

"That aside, though," James continued without needing any feedback from his conversation partner. "As much as I like this new assertive you, you really shouldn't have come up and talked to me in front of the others like that. Now, I'll have to try and come up with some crafty explanation."

"Preferably one that doesn't involve them thinking I'm blackmailing you," Severus glared over his shoulder at James.

"And, there goes my current top contender for a cover story. Hey!" James snapped his fingers and looked inordinately pleased with himself. "Maybe we can brainstorm together!"

"No, thank you," Severus said blandly, having finally reached his destination.

The door he was looking for was a small battered wooden one set into an alcove at the end of the transfiguration corridor. Compared to the other doors lining the hallway, it was plain. There was only a simple brass door knob and brass hinges. It looked like there were once intricately carved and painted twining leaves and branches painted onto it, but they were nearly obliterated by many lifetimes worth of scrubbing and rough children.

Snape turned the knob and pulled the door open. The inside was dark, but not so dark that it was immediately apparent that the door opened up onto a broom closet. A painfully normal one for a school so teeming with the unusual. There was broom shoved in one corner with a dustpan behind it, a bucket and a cloying moldy smell.

Severus was inordinately familiar with this small broom closet. Once, in fourth year, James and his friends had thought it would be funny to push him in and close the door. Severus had never been sure if they had locked the door on purpose or if the old door had simply locked itself with all of the rattling and banging that had been going on at the time. He hadn't been let out until nearly seven hours later, when Filch made his first pass on patrol and heard his sniffling.

"Uh," James said articulately shortly before Severus took him by the shoulders and manhandled him into the closet before stepping in after him and closing the door. Severus did not expect he would have been able to manipulate James so easily if he wasn't so completely thrown off balance.

"Um, what...?" James continued to spew eloquence as Severus roughly pushed his robe off of his shoulders. The expensive black fabric pooled around Potter's feet like liquid black shadow.

"Did somebody enchant you or something?" James finally struggled out as Severus struggled to loosen the knot of James' tie. His eyes were starting to adjust to the dim light slipping in around the cracks of the door, but it was still hard to see what he was doing and Potter's knot was obscenely complicated.

"Why do you say that?" Severus muttered, still struggling with the tie and not completely paying attention to the boy it was tied around.

"You just came up and spoke to me, in public, in front of my friends. Then, you admitted that you wanted to see me. Now, you've cornered me in a broom closet and are trying to get my clothes off," James explained, his voice becoming a little more hysterical as he went on.

Severus huffed impatiently and just pulled the tie until it was loose enough that he could pull it off over James' head.

"I won't pretend that I don't have an ulterior motive," he mumbled as he began to work on the small opalescent buttons of James' starched white shirt. If possible, they were even more stubborn than his tie.

"Oh, do tell," James said, the hysterics quickly giving way to his quick temper.

"I'm eager for this to end," Severus said, his mouth close enough to James' that he didn't need to talk above a whisper to be heard. "Aren't you?" he added when he felt James stiffen under his hands.

When he didn't answer, Severus returned to the task of unbuttoning his shirt.

On a whim, he leaned forward on his toes and pressed a dry kiss to James' jaw where it met his neck. The Gryffindor twitched underneath his hands.

James smelt like fresh sweat and sunshine. His smell was especially concentrated at the nape of his neck and the hairs tickled Severus' nose when he nuzzled there. The warm sunny smell probably came from Quidditch practice earlier in the day.

After undoing all of the buttons Severus yanked the ends of James' shirt out of his trousers and then went to work on his belt. He was trying to pull the soft leather belt from James' belt loops when James finally replied.

"I don't know," he said in a small voice.

Severus looked up, but even though his eyes had adjusted as much as they were able to the faint light in the closet, he couldn't make out James' expression.

Sighing, Severus let James' belt fall to the closet floor with a rattle. He could at least empathize with James, as much as he was loathe to admit it to himself. He also had mixed feeling about their bet finally coming to a conclusion.

Severus tucked his fingers under James' collar and gave it a small yank. "It's unhealthy," he pushed himself to say. He kept his eyes trained firmly on James' collarbone. He wasn't willing to look up into his stormy gray eyes. "What we're doing, this stupid bet, it's unhealthy," he continued in a firm voice. "And, frankly, more than a little stupid. Maybe one or both of us were trying to make a point in the beginning. But, by this point, we're just fooling around, aren't we?" he asked, his voice becoming weaker as he went on.

These were thoughts and feelings that he hadn't quite got around to admitting to himself. He wasn't any more comfortable saying them out loud to Potter.

James' breath stirred the hair hanging in Severus' face as he huffed out a breath.

"You're right, I suppose," he muttered.

Severus sniffed and unceremoniously pulled James' shirt off of his shoulders to join his robe on the floor. "I'm glad you see reason," Severus responded.

Pressing the palms of his hands to James' flank, Severus paused as the thought occurred to him that he could stop.

James had just agreed that the bet was stupid and unhealthy. He had said so himself. If they were both in agreement, then what was he doing? He should just tell James he was going to stop fooling around with him. Lily was her own person and, through repeated exposure, he had come to

understand that James (while by no means a good person) wasn't actually evil incarnate.

"So," James said slowly, oblivious to Severus' inner turmoil. "That means we just have two more times, right? What did you have in mind for today?" James asked, leaning forward. Severus saw a flash of white from a toothy smile.

Severus realized in that moment that he should just walk out. He could leave before James had a chance to put his clothes to rights and be in his dorm before he caught up to him. If Severus didn't want to explain his reasoning then, he could explain it later. Nobody was twisting his arm to do this. And, yet.

And, yet.

And, yet the idea of stopping just then made his stomach knot in displeasure and his palms break out in a cold sweat.

James settled his hands on the sharp jut of Severus' hips and pressed his nose and mouth into the hair near his ear. "I'm up for whatever you're up for," James said, but underneath the teasing tone, Severus thought he sounded sad.

Severus licked his lips, his mouth suddenly dry. "I want..." he started, his voice croaking more than he expected. He cleared his throat and tried again. "I want you to fuck me," he said. He felt James' chest expand as he breathed in to say something Severus was sure was stupid, so he cut him off with a sharp, "Slow! Gently, different than you usually do."

"Course, love," James agreed readily. His arms snaked around Severus' back and pressed him tightly to his chest. "Whatever you want." He pressed his mouth to Severus' neck and breathed deeply while Severus tried not to die of shame.

It was just this and one more time.

James nosed Severus' hair out of the way and pressed his lips to Severus' neck. Snape wondered if Potter could feel his pulse pounding against his mouth. It felt like his heart was trying to beat its way out of his chest. If James noticed anything, he gave no indication of it.

Severus wiggled in James' arms until he could shrug out of his own robe and pull worn off-white shirt from his not at all pressed trousers.

"How do you want to do this?" James mumbled against the damp skin of Severus' neck. The rush of air, even the warm air from James' lungs, sent a shiver down his back.

"Erm," Severus mumbled, putting some distance between the two of them until James unlatched himself from his neck. "Do you still know how to do do the, ah," Severus waved his hand in the air inarticulately as he searched for a word that would both describe what he was looking for, but also would not cause him to burst into flames due to his own excessive amounts of shame.

"You'll need to help me here," James said flatly. Severus couldn't see his face clearly, but he could infer from his tone of voice that he probably looked distinctly unimpressed.

"Do you still know that spell?" Severus snapped. "You used it one time to, ah. On me, it made it..." Severus trailed off, still struggling to find the perfect explanation for what he wanted.

"Oh! The instant lube incantation!" James exclaimed, squeezing Severus a little closer in an involuntary show of excitement. "That is what you mean, right?"

"That isn't actually what it's called," Severus said, rather than admitting that was what he was looking for.

"It doesn't have a proper name, I don't think. Remus taught it to me, though, so I could ask him?" James offered.

"No!" Severus exclaimed. "No, that won't be necessary."

James huffed a laugh into the juncture of Severus' neck and shoulder before pulling him back in close. His hands inched around Severus' back, moving slowly up and down once before sliding down past the top of his pants to firmly squeeze his ass cheeks in his hands.

Severus bit back an embarrassing sound even as his dick twitched in interest in his pants.

Come to think of it, it had been a while since they last went all the way. Severus hadn't thought he missed it in the slightest, but when pressed it was the first thing he had asked for.

The Slytherin student sighed a little in disgust at his own taste, not that he could really help it.

While Severus had been mourning his own slowly evolving kinks, James had made quick work of his pants and underwear, pushing them roughly to the ground. Afterward, he moved back in to grope Severus without the layered protection of his clothing.

"I'm a little sore from practice," James whispered, his hands roving closer and deeper into Severus' crack with each rub. Severus kept his face firmly buried in James' shoulder, his face burning crimson even as his dick went from interested to sharply at attention. "I don't know if I'll be able to hold you up."

Severus was confused by the statement for a second, until the pieces snapped together in his head. James expected that, since they were both pretty close to naked and currently standing, that they would have sex standing up. And, knowing him, was picturing some kind of adventurous position.

Holding back a sigh, Severus started to pull away from James. "Then, we'll sit," he explained, toeing off his shoes, mindless of the already battered and scored leather of his loafers.

"Will there be room?" James asked doubtfully, banging against the broom in the corner and then the door as he stumbled away from it while struggling out of his trousers.

This time, Severus didn't bother to hold back the sigh. "So long as you don't try anything too acrobatic."

Severus shrugged out of his collared shirt and let it fold around him, unconcerned about wrinkles.

"Pfft!" James made a sound inappropriate for a boy his age and sat down heavily between Severus' already spread legs. "You say that like you don't enjoy my acrobatics," James teased with an ostentatious eyebrow waggle.

Kicking him half heartedly, Severus said deadpan, "James, I don't enjoy your acrobatics."

"That fucking hurts," James groused.

"Will you just get on with it?" Severus snapped impatiently, his erection sadly wilting between his legs with every lackluster verbal exchange.

"Yes, your majesty," James sighed, taking Severus by the ankle and unceremoniously lifting it up

above his shoulder.

Severus stiffened, both his body and his cock, as his shoulders fell back heavily to the wall behind him as the change in position spread him wider. James fumbled for a moment with the lump of fabric that was his robe before pulling out his wand. He pointed it at the juncture of Severus' legs and muttered the incantation. This time, Severus listened carefully.

"**Aqua Ducatus**" James muttered, twirling his wand in a quarter circle widdershins before giving it a jaunty snap forward.

Immediately, Severus felt his entire groin become very suddenly extremely wet and slippery.

Blushing, but hoping that the faint light of the closet hid it well enough, Severus stumbled out, "Lupin taught you that?"

James shifted forward, the tops of his thighs meeting the bottom of Severus'. "Yes," he responded, laughter tickling his words. "But, as to why Remus knows it and what he uses it for, I'm sworn to secrecy."

Severus sniffed. "I wasn't actually going to ask."

"Which is fortunate, because I wasn't actually going to tell you," James replied, pressing his finger down into the crack of Severus' ass and rubbing firmly over his hole with little to do.

Severus felt his face get hotter and bit his lip to stop from making any excessively embarrassing noises. His neglected dick twitched against his stomach and Severus reached forward take it in hand without much thought.

James was breathing heavily above him, starting to press his finger into the tight ring of muscle with each pass he made over Severus' asshole.

"It's been a while, huh?" he asked, his voice shaking with something, either emotion, restraint or something else.

Severus swallowed before answering, squeezing his dick as if in warning. "Yeah, a little while," he agreed, pressing down slightly on James' hand. They had done this before even if, like James had said, it had been a little while. He knew he told him to be gentle, but he was starting to get impatient.

James took the hint and painstakingly slide his middle finger into Severus' ass up to the second knuckle. Severus allowed himself to squeeze around the intrusion for a brief moment, just to get the impulse out of his system. The impatient groan it drew out of James was just an added bonus.

"I know I said to be careful, but you can move a little faster," Severus suggested, his voice quiet. He blamed it on his quickening breath and how hard he was trying to keep his own embarrassing sounds to himself.

"Fuck," James grunted.

He shifted, pulling his finger out of Severus as he did so. Severus bit down on a soft sound of regret at the loss and only just barely stopped it from passing his lips. James used his free hands to grasp Severus behind each knee and drag him forward. He leaned between them and Severus felt James' own leaking cock press briefly into the crease of his leg.

"Okay, this is better," James grunted, taking Severus' leg by the knee and pushing it forward

toward Severus' chest.

Snape wasn't sure he could agree. His shoulders were still pressed against the wall, but that was the only thing stopping him from being flat on his back. And, with his leg pressed up and against him, he felt extremely exposed.

James pressed into Severus again with his middle finger, this time pressing until it was fully inside him. Severus sighed, forcing his muscles to relax, anticipating that James would start moving quickly. As he anticipated, James pumped his finger in and out of Severus for a little less than a minute before pressing in with a second finger.

There was a burn, but not as much as Severus had been expecting. Everything was still extremely wet and slippery, the pace slower than what it had been in the past, and Severus much more calm than then, as well. He was able to focus on relaxing around the intrusion as much as possible and that seemed to be greatly easing the way for James.

Severus idly pumped his hand on his dick, using the slowly building heat of his own climax to distract him from the stretch and burn as James scissored his fingers open as he pulled out, pressing in as far as he could as he moved back in.

"Just one more," James breathed, leaning sideways to press a dry kiss to the side of Severus' leg. Severus grunted in agreement, moving his hand faster on himself as James pressed a third finger inside of him.

The stretch was more real now, but he felt ready for it. The pleasure was outweighing the burn James was stirring up as he stretched Severus' muscles farther. Their short pants were filling the dim quiet of the closet, obscene wet sounds louder than any whispered words or gasps that the two of them could exchange.

"That's enough," Severus gasped when James pressed especially deep with his fingers, his knuckles pressed tight against Severus' ass. "That's good enough," Severus repeated slower, when James pulled back."

"Oh," James replied, a small sound of realization as he paused and then completely removed his fingers from Severus.

This time, Severus couldn't hold back the moan as the sudden feeling of emptiness assaulted him. If James heard it, he didn't comment on it, shuffling Severus' legs so that they were settled on either side of his hips.

James held Severus' hip in one hand and himself in the other and he slowly tried to press inside. Severus' whole groin was slippery and it took three tries before James was able to press into him without sliding forward or backward.

Severus gasped sharply as James' head made it past the ring of muscle. As much as the fingers had stretched him, this was still a bigger intrusion. James grunted and let go of his own dick to gasp Severus' other hip. His hand was calloused and slippery where it squeezed him.

James pressed forward, his movement inexorable, a steady invasion that Severus could feel all the way in his lower belly by the time that James finally sat fully inside of him.

"Fuck, Sev," James breathed. Severus wasn't sure if it was benediction or a curse. But, whatever it was, Severus liked the way it sounded coming out of James' mouth.

"You can move," Severus said and his voice sounded breathless. "I'm okay," he added.

James didn't reply or need any further prodding to do just that. He pulled back just a little and pushed back in hard, hard enough to drive the breath out of both Severus and himself. With another small muttered "fuck" he began to set up a steady rhythm.

He started shallowly, slowly and then gradually drew out his thrusts. He kept the same speed, gradually pulling out further and thrusting out deeper until he was almost completely withdrawing by the end. The pace maddening, it was so slow. Severus could feel every inch of James moving in and out of him.

The hand that he had kept moving leisurely up and down on his dick up until that point couldn't afford to do that anymore. Instead, his fingers were wrapped firmly around base, squeezing at every uncontrollable wave of pleasurable. Even with the mollifying strength of his fingers trying to stave off orgasm, he was sure he would come miles ahead of James if he kept up the same pace.

"Faster," Severus gasped. "Gods, please," he begged, a benediction for sure this time, "Fuck me faster," Severus continued, trying to fuck himself on James' dick and not having much luck since the Gryffindor had such a tight grip on his hips.

James gave a breathless laugh, his hips stuttered only momentarily before picking up the pace quickly. Severus groaned from somewhere deep in his chest and let his head fall back against the wall with a dull thud.

"I can't say no to that," James commented, before letting go of Severus' hips and leaning over him to brace his hands on either side of his waist. Severus' free hand grasped onto James' wrist, the movement instinctive, grasping for everything and anything to hold onto as James' powerful hips drove into him.

Severus was gasping, struggling to try and get upright, but the angle was so hopeless, all he could do was lie there and allow James to fuck him as hard and as fast as he wanted. The thought of that, almost as much as the feeling itself, sent every other thought Severus might have tried to entertain running for the hills. He couldn't think or question anything. He could only feel James and experience the moment.

James came first, which was a little disappointing. Severus felt the rhythm become uncoordinated and could hear James grunting loudly above him. Then, he felt the rush of warmth inside of him.

He must have made a sound of disappointment, something to indicate his own feelings about the development, because James hadn't begun to recover before he was knocking aside Severus' hand and wrapping his own calloused fingers around his cock. His grip was firmer than what Severus usually used himself and his dick was already sensitive from him rubbing at it for so long. He whole body twitched as soon as James grabbed it.

Growling like an animal, James started to jerk Severus off hard, running his thumb up over the head on almost every pass and leaning down to bite and suck hard on the delicate skin just below his ear.

Severus felt his orgasm quickly build back up, felt himself clench around James' already spent dick inside of him and could hardly bring himself to care. His hands came up to clutch helplessly at James upper arms as he continued to work him over, his hips moving in little desperate twitches even though his dick was spent.

It only took a few moments of James' rough attention before Severus came, his own ejaculate spotting his stomach and pooling in his belly button.

Afterward, James pulled out and Severus blushed at the feeling of James' come leaking out of him slowly.

Arms and legs trembling, the Gryffindor carefully lifted the Slytherin boy upright and propped him against the wall. He fumbled behind himself for his robe before finding it and fitting it around Severus' shoulders, between the cool wall and his pale pasty skin. James then fit himself against Severus' front, leaning his forehead on the wall behind him.

Severus allowed his exhausted and wrung out body lean heavily against James' chest.

"We should leave and get cleaned up before this stuff dries," Severus mumbled tiredly into James' shoulder.

"Cleaning spell," James mumbled back.

It wasn't a good proper answer, but Severus didn't really want to argue. For just that moment, he could pretend that it was just the two of them in that broom closet and that the school and their classmates and their house's hatred of one another didn't exist.

## Ninety-Three

It was Severus' turn to avoid James in their little dalliance after the broom closet. Or, maybe the avoidance was mutual. Severus found that he didn't have to work very hard to stay out of the path of James Potter in the weeks following that meeting.

Severus was fine with that. He had almost convinced himself that he was fine if he never spoke to James Potter face to face for the rest of their school life. Severus found that his feelings and his convictions about James Potter were about as solid as the blood pudding in the great hall. One moment, he was sure that he loathed James Potter just as much as he always had. The next, he would remember the sound of his soft exhalation of 'fuck' and then Severus wasn't sure what he thought.

Severus assumed that James was struggling with something similar, if their strangely tender encounter was anything to go by. So, rather than talking about it, they avoided each other.

One week went by while Severus told himself that he would work out his feelings and talk to James. But, one week turned into two which turned into three and neither boy approached the other.

It was almost time for Christmas break and Severus was looking forward to returning home for a short while to his mother's eccentric but kind attention by the time he received the note.

It was hidden behind the front cover of his Advanced Potions textbooks, so that it slid out and onto the floor beside him when he pulled it out of his bag. Severus had frowned down at the folded piece of parchment paper, not remembering putting it there himself, but at a loss as to how else it would have gotten there.

Severus had reached down and picked up the slip of paper and put both the paper and his textbook on the desk. The note had his name, Severus, scratched in an inelegant hand on the outside. When he flipped the note open, the message inside was very simple.

*Meet me at the top of Pollux Tower at midnight.*

J.

Recognizing the initial immediately, Severus' head snapped up and looked at the table in the far back corner that usually housed James and his cronies. He found that James was staring back at him with an intense expression. But, as soon as their eyes met, James looked down at his textbook.

Severus continued to try and catch James' eye throughout the lecture, to the disgruntled bemusement of their professor, but was unable to do so. When the double period finally let out, Severus stood up with the intention of going straight to James and asking him what his cryptic note was about, but the Gryffindor had already snatched up his bag and ran for the door.

Sighing, Severus gave it up as a bad job. He glanced down at the note again, at James' bad handwriting. He wasn't sure how he had slipped the note to him, but he could guess why James wanted to meet clandestinely on an isolated tower. Pollux Tower was a small tower across the green from the Great Hall. It wasn't very tall, acting as one of the corners of the tall stone wall that surrounded the castle grounds. It would certainly be deserted and undisturbed on a cold winter night.

Shoving the note into the pocket of his robe that didn't have a hole, Severus packed his belongings into his bag and then left the potions classroom and made his way to his next class.

He would meet Potter at the tower, even though the thought of doing so had his stomach tied up in knots. He told himself the prospect of being caught by Filch out past curfew was what had him nervous and not the prospect of their meeting being the final time he and Potter would ever meet like that.

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The air was cold and biting when Severus finally slipped out of the hall and out into the night air at just a quarter til midnight. The night sky was clear as it could be, the moon waning slowly and allowing the stars to light up the night sky. There were no clouds to obscure their pale white light and no wind passed over the still grass tumbling out in front of Severus.

Severus' breath fogged up in front of him as it hit the cold still air. He could see Pollux Tower straight across the lawn from him, small and dark against the rolling hills of the scottish countryside.

Taking a deep steady breath, Severus began the silent trek across the crunchy grass toward the stone tower. His stomach was cramped and uncomfortable. His nerves had prevented him from eating anything during either lunch or dinner, so he wasn't sure if the dull pain was hunger or just the ache of muscles that hadn't been able to unclench since he first received James' note in Potions.

Severus walked for several silent minutes, before reaching the base of the tower and looking around. There was no sign of James Potter anywhere. Severus shivered, feeling slightly more cold in the shadow of the great stone wall.

After a few moments of standing uncertainly at the foot of the tower, a small glimmering light above him caught his attention. Turning around and looking up, Severus caught sight of a pale blue light emanating from the tip of what he could only assume was James' wand. The silhouette of James waved his wand arm impatiently, gesturing for Severus to come up.

Sighing, Severus obeyed James' unspoken command and stepped up to the heavy wooden door set

deep into the worn stone alcove. When he grasped the handle and pushed, it opened easily.

The inside of the tower was bare. When Hogwarts was still an active castle, this was most likely a guard post. The inside was most likely filled with cots and a rough hewn table and maybe a cupboard filled with bread and whiskey. Severus could imagine it all vividly. Now, however, the tower was empty, with just a bare stone staircase in the center that lead up to the top of the tower.

Severus began to carefully scale the treacherous steps after casting a hushed 'lumos' spell to light his way. When he reached the top of the stairs, he found a trap door that he had to push open before he could exit onto the top of the tower.

At the top of the tower, Severus found James Potter waiting in what appeared to be an agitated anticipation.

James was standing awkwardly near the edge of the tower where he had waved to Severus. His lumos spell was extinguished, though he still held his wand in his hand. There was a small mound of what appeared to be blankets and thick comforters behind him. James himself was bundled up in a thick fur lined cloak that looked absolutely cozy compared to Severus' cloak that was worn extremely thin in some places and patched with mis-matching fabric in others.

The two young men stared at each other for a long moment, James fidgeting nervously with his wand while Severus remained with only his shoulders protruding from the trap door.

Clearing his throat with some difficulty, James proclaimed, "Come on up! It's practically homey," with a stiff bow and wave of his hand.

Severus frowned, but did as he was bid. He climbed the rest of the way out of the trapdoor, closing it gently behind him. Once he had done so, he stood awkwardly beside the door and watched James continue to fidget.

Severus had plenty of things he wanted to ask James. 'Why did you want to meet on the top of a tower in the middle of winter?' chief among them, but there were others. 'Are you as conflicted about our tryst in the broom closet as I am?' was another good one, followed by 'What do you want to happen once the bet is over?' Unfortunately, Severus could not bring himself to voice any of them. So, he just continued to watch James struggle.

Clearing his throat again, James danced the few steps over to Severus and grabbed him by the wrist, as if he was afraid the other boy would dash away from him at any moment. He hauled Severus over to the pile of blankets and then let him go briefly to grab a heavy dark brown comforter off of the top of the pile and throw it over Severus' shoulders. Immediately he felt himself wrapped in a delectable warmth. He couldn't help the little 'Oh!' of surprise that popped out of him.

James grinned widely and then grabbed another blanket off the pile and threw it around his own shoulders. "I cast Callesco spells on them, so they should be pretty warm," the Gryffindor boasted proudly.

Severus pulled his blanket higher on his neck and snuggled down into it, content enough to say, "I admit, I wasn't sure how we were going to do this. The blankets are somewhat ingenious."

Severus hadn't thought it possible, but James' grin grew even wider.

"I thought," James said haltingly, breaking Severus out of his simple enjoyment of the warmth on his cheeks after long minutes of walking through the cold. "I thought that, since you requested

something last time, that I could request something this time.”

Severus frowned a little. He was tempted to snap that James had picked how they did everything almost every time they had fucked since the beginning of the bet. But, the hesitance in the way that James had spoken and the thoughtfulness of the charmed blankets convinced him otherwise.

“What were you thinking?” Severus huffed, not willing to blindly agree to anything.

James’ cheeks colored a deep pink and he looked away quickly. Severus’ eyebrows crawled up his head at the display of what appeared to be sincere embarrassment on James Potter’s face.

“I thought that, maybe,” James muttered, seeming to talk mostly to his own right shoe, “That, maybe, you could do me this time,” James rushed out, his face turning an almost beet red.

Severus stared at James silently, trying to convince himself that he had heard wrong.

When the silence had stretched on too long, James jerked his head up with a wide grin pasted on his face. “I mean, you always seemed to enjoy it so much! I thought, you know, if this is the last time then this may be my only opportunity to find out what it is you like about it so much.”

James’ grin was wide and tight and looked just as sharp as all the other grins that he had tossed Severus’ way since the two had met. But, something about this one felt put on, like a mask of his own face that hadn’t settled quite right over his skin.

Severus fidgeted under the comforter. Its weight felt heavy enough to put him on his knees in that moment. An angry little voice inside of him was cheering for Severus to jump at the chance. Did James not understand how vulnerable he would be, offering himself up to Severus like that? How many times had Severus cried and sobbed at the pain of being penetrated? How often had he been teased for fidgeting in his seat, unable to sit right after an unkind thrashing by one James Potter? It was fully within Severus’ rights to show James just how ‘good’ it felt.

But, that voice was small and angry and almost easy for Severus to dismiss. Once upon a time, he might not have been able to hear anything but that voice, but that had been changing lately.

“It doesn’t usually feel that good,” Severus said haltingly, not quite sure why he was warning James. “Even if I try very hard not to hurt you, I might do it anyway. I don’t exactly know what I’m doing.”

“Sure, you do! You’ve had it done to you plenty of times,” James said in a cheerful voice as he turned away to look down pondering at the pile of blankets. He seemed to be dismissing Severus’ warning out of hand and instead taking it as an agreement.

“It’s not the same,” Severus snapped, his eyebrows knotting in frustration. “Just because you fuck me all the time, doesn’t mean I know how to fuck someone without hurting them. Or, for that matter, how to make it feel good.”

James huffed a sigh of what might have been impatience before kneeling down and grabbing a bundle of blankets up in his arms. He moved away from the pile a little bit and threw the bundle down, pushing and pulling at them until they sort of look like a nest.

“It will be fine,” James sighed, as he pushed and pulled at the odd assortment of linens. “I trust you.”

That phrase hit Severus like a fist to the stomach. Severus tried to swallow around a sudden dryness in his throat. He felt suddenly dizzy, like James had popped him in the head so hard he had spun

him in a full circle and he ended facing the same way he started. He felt soundly defeated.

Trying to control his gelatinous knees, Severus carefully picked his way over the blankets strewn on the floor to James and kneeled cautiously to his right.

James huffed and gave a disgruntled glance to the bed nest that he had built. "It doesn't look comfortable at all," he grumbled.

"It's fine," Severus croaked, flushing an embarrassed pink at his own cracking voice and James answering grin. Clearing his throat, Severus repeated, "It's fine. You brought plenty of blankets. Lay down."

It was James' turn to flush, his normally tan skin flushing a dusky pink across his cheeks and down his neck as he slowly crawled onto the pile of blankets and then turned around to face Severus with his legs splayed. Even though he was blushing intensely, his expression was challenging.

Severus felt his lips turn down in a frown. He felt hugely under qualified to fuck James Potter. James was charismatic, popular, and handsome. Everyone in school loved him. He supposed it was for these same reasons that he was probably the only person James could ask to do this to him. Even if Severus told someone, they would never believe him. It didn't make Severus feel anymore prepared to fuck James, quite the opposite.

Either way, he had warned James that he didn't know what he was doing. If James felt it was prudent to ignore him, then any and all outcomes he could carry himself.

Kicking off his beaten loafers, Severus climbed onto the nest of blankets after James. He helped James take off his shoes and then his tie. He lifted his heavy fur lined cloak so that James could shrug out of his cardigan and dress shirt and then settled the fur against his wide bare shoulders, noting with a jolt of pleasure that James shivered as the fur settled against his skin.

James' hands were shaking as he worked to unbuckle his belt. Impatient, Severus slapped them away and pulled the belt free himself.

"You get naked too," James breathed, his flat belly shaking a little in the cold. His dick was already half hard.

Severus threw James a small frown before reaching behind him to pull more blankets off the pile and throw them over James' front. James made a small pleased sound before tucking the blanket around him more securely and snuggling in.

His hands now shaking (though he told himself it was just from being out in the cold for so long), Severus began to pull off his own clothes. He shrugged out of his bedraggled cloak first, letting it fall to the floor in a puddle behind him. Then, he pulled his own button down off, followed by the threadbare long sleeve thermal underneath. The air was frigid and he felt his skin bead up into gooseflesh almost immediately. He pulled his own belt loose and tossed it behind him before shucking his pants, underwear and socks all in one go. The pants were too big for him without the belt, so it was easy to push them down over his bony hips without undoing the button or the zipper.

Severus sat for a long moment, shivering in the cold moonlight as James stared at him with large dark gray eyes from between his fringe and the top of the blanket. Severus' whole body was shivering, his stomach, arms and legs all twitching as his body attempted to keep his body temperature up.

"Are you going to let me in?" Severus snapped around his own chattering teeth.

James blinked, whatever spell he was under seemed to be under broken, and held the blanket aside so that Severus could move into the warm alcove between the blanket, and James' front.

"Fuck, you're cold!" James hissed as Severus pressed up against him. Severus moaned loudly at the feeling of James' warm flesh against his own. He was so hot that the touch almost hurt, but quickly melted into an intensely good feeling as his shakes settled down and the warmth seeped back into his muscles.

Severus shifted against James, his thighs tucked under James', and felt James' fully hard dick rub against his stomach. "You're hard," Severus mumbled, tucking his hands closer around James' back, pressing James' dick between both their bellies.

"Mmf," James grunted back, an acknowledgement and not much more. He had his nose tucked into the curve of Severus' neck and was nuzzling is cold nose into it.

"I sort of thought you might be having me on," Severus continued when it seemed clear that James wasn't going to add any kind of crude joke.

That seemed to get James' attention as he sat back to look at Severus' content face with a frown. "What do you mean, having you on?" he asked sharply, sharper than Severus expected.

"I just meant that I didn't think you would actually get excited about the prospect of being fucked. But, obviously I was wrong," Severus said in a wry tone, looking down at the shadowy space between their torsos before pulling one hand back from behind James' back and giving his dick an appraising squeeze.

James hissed a little at the sudden cold touch, but his hips gave a little involuntary jerk into Severus' hand.

Fumbling a little, James pressed one of his hands between Severus' legs to squeeze at his still flaccid cock. He frowned, looking somewhat hurt. "You're not hard at all," he pouted, his mouth set into moue of distaste.

"Unlike you, I am not constantly in rut. It takes more than a flash of nudity to make my dick hard," Severus sniffed.

"You're so cold blooded. Is it because you're a slytherin?" James teased, even as he continued to rub harder at Severus' dick.

Severus snorted at the terrible joke despite himself. "Gods, next you'll ask if I have a forked tongue," he scoffed.

James bit his lip before moving both hands to Severus' armpits and physically pulling him on top of him as he laid back. Severus ended up on his hands and knees and James' knees tucked up around his hips as James continued to try and jerk him to full erection.

"Wait," Severus choked out, moving back and out of the range of James' hand.

"What?" James snapped, the frustration back in his voice.

Severus frowned for a moment. It had seemed things were moving a little too fast, but James was right to try and start to get things going. He was still feeling cautious because he wouldn't know what would happen after, but Severus had his chance to ask his questions and he had missed it. He supposed that he could wait until after their bet was complete to talk to James.

"This position is better," Severus mumbled, moving to lay alongside James, the two facing each other beneath the blanket. James sidled closer to Severus and Severus wrapped his hand around James' dick again.

James' hips jerked and he was shallowly fucking the circle of Severus' hand. "Why are you always so quick to think I'm lying?" James asked, his voice a little breathy. "Why are you so quick to think I'm a git?" he asked a little sharper.

Severus huffed a laugh behind his closed mouth. "Probably because you are one," he answered, unimpressed.

Pushing forward, Severus braced himself on his elbow so that he could tighten his grip around James and start to jerk him off in earnest. He twisted a little bit when he brought his hand to the top of James' dick in the why he himself liked and, if James' heavy panting and softly muttered 'fuck' was any indication, he liked it too.

They kept up like that for a while, the little pocket of blankets quickly starting to smell like musk, sex and quietly breathed curses.

"Wait, stop!" James groaned, trying and failing to knock Severus' hand away.

"What?" Severus growled. He hadn't touched himself yet, but he was starting to feel the blood pool in his dick. He was slow to start that night, his head still churning with confusion and anxiety.

"I'm gonna come," James huffed, his hips still jerking in time with Severus' hand even as he held on tightly to his forearm.

"That's kind of the idea," Severus sighed. He was hoping that if he got James off once that it might take some of the edge off and he might be more relaxed when it came time to finger him open.

James whined deep in his throat, his hips bucking in earnest now. Severus worked to keep the pace of his hand steady.

"Kiss me," James breathed into the quiet between their bodies.

"What?" Severus asked again, confusion and a little bit of trepidation lining the word.

"You want me to come, don't you?" James snapped. "Then, kiss me!"

Severus hesitated. Why did James have to make everything so entirely and completely complicated. One moment he wanted to just fuck, the next he wanted him to kiss him. Severus believed that fucking without strings attached sort of precluded kissing passionately, but maybe James didn't think that way.

Telling himself not to read too much into it, Severus leaned forward, hovering over James as he carefully pressed his mouth to James' open panting one. Like a blind man given water, James lunged for him and they met in a sharp clack of teeth.

"Fuck, Potter!" Severus exclaimed. But, he hadn't sat back fast enough and James had reached up to tangle his hand in his hair and hold him bodily down against him.

James didn't kiss him so much as keep his panting mouth against his, their lips occasionally brushing and their breath intermingling in the close space. Something about that was so tender and so intimate that it sent a throb of lust and fear down Severus' spine.

When James came in Severus' hand, it was with a bitten off moan. Severus felt the Gryffindor's whole body tremble, felt the way he curled up like a burning leaf toward him, his forehead pressing hard against his own.

Once the moment had passed, James collapsed into a boneless heap, breathing like he had just run a marathon.

Severus remained hovering over James for a while, trying to will his own erection down while James panted hotly into his mouth. He tried thinking of what his mother might say if she found out he was spending his free time at Hogwarts fucking boys. That quickly took the wind out of his sails and he was able to reassess the situation with a significantly clearer mind.

"Roll over," Severus grunted, prodding at James' side until the other boy whined like a small child and complied.

Severus was treated to the feeling of James' broad muscled back, something he hadn't had the privilege to see much of up close before. He ran his hands from the tops of James shoulders, down his back, until he could grip each ass cheek in one hand. James groaned appreciatively and canted his ass up, the kind of reaction that Severus had not expected and was not prepared for.

Fumbling more than was absolutely necessary, Severus found James' wand and handed it to him in a slightly trembling hand.

"Do that spell or whatever," he mumbled, taking James' hand once he had accepted the wand and directing it toward his ass.

James chuckled, the sound deep and wheezy and arousing. "You mean, the instant lube spell?" he teased.

"You know what I mean!" Severus snapped, hoping that James couldn't see his red face in the dim light beneath the blankets.

James laughed again, but complied, twisting his wand in a complicated maneuver while muttering "**Aqua Ducatus**". There was a wet splattering sound that made Severus jump out of the splash zone and James gasp. When Severus reached down to check that he had hit the right spot, he found that the entire area around James' buttocks and the tops of his thighs were doused with lube.

"Well, more is better than less, in this situation," Severus muttered, trailing his fingertips through the mess and savoring the way it made James' ass jump and his thighs clench.

Groaning and wiggling, James pressed his face into the blankets he had wadded up into a pillow at the soft touches. "Okay, you can fuck me now," he sang impatiently.

"I hope by fuck you mean finger," Severus returned dryly.

"Whatever! You can start now," James said.

"Oh, Lord Potter! Thank you so much for your permission," Severus said sarcastically, rolling his eyes and deciding to boldly press a finger against James' entrance.

His reaction was impressive. James gasped at the initial touch and then moaned deep in his chest, letting his head drop down to pillow on his arms.

Severus gently rubbed the pad of his finger over James' hole and felt it clench and relax under his touch. James was making breathy sounds and in the dim light breaking in from the cracks between

the blankets, Severus could see his hands clenching and relaxing.

"You really like this," Severus murmured, surprised and yet somehow not at all surprised. In a strange way, it made sense to him that what James Potter wanted most was for someone else to put him on his back.

"What gave you that impression?" James sighed, canting his hips up a little bit to encourage Severus on. "You can press a little harder," he added, "I won't break."

Severus swallowed around the frog in his throat and pushed down a little firmer with his finger. James sighed in return and let his head flop back down.

"Tell me if it's too much and I'll back off," Severus said when he felt he had his voice back under control. "Otherwise, I'll just keep pushing okay?"

"Mhmm," James hummed, his hips twitching a little as Severus continued to pass over his entrance again and again, teasing him but never entering.

As he continued to rub Severus felt what he was waiting for, the feeling of the soft skin giving under his finger give a little more with each pass. Eventually, it was becoming too hard to stop from pressing into James with each swipe, so Severus allowed the pressure and James' own softening entrance to let him in.

James gasped and his back curled up a bit at the first breach. He was so warm and tight around Severus' finger that it made him a little dizzy to think about putting his dick in him and he had just started to finger him.

Carefully, Severus worked his finger in and out, keeping a careful ear out for any pained sounds from James. Judging from the tiny breathy sounds James made every time Severus breached him, he definitely wasn't in pain. So, after a few shallow thrusts, Severus moved on to one long sustained thrust, burying his finger as deep inside of James as he could.

Above him, James whined high in his throat, a sound Severus didn't think he ever heard him make before, followed by a small broken "ah, fuck".

Severus kept his finger inside of him and whispered hesitantly, "Okay?"

"Yes, yep. It's fine. Keep going," James responded quickly in a strangled voice.

Severus frowned, but decided to take him at his word.

Wiggling his finger around, Severus thrust in and out some more, trying different angles to see how James reacted to each. He was looking for that sweet spot that he knew must be inside him somewhere and he found it on one particularly hard down stroke that forced James' shoulders to jerk up with a yelp.

"There we are," Severus said, mostly to himself. Having that spot at his disposal would make the unraveling of James Potter that much easier.

"I'm going to add a second finger now," Severus said, rubbing both his index and middle finger up and down the seam of James' ass.

All he got in reply was a jumble of sounds that might have been words if James bothered to lift his head up out of the blankets. Rolling his eyes, Severus very gently began to ease both fingers inside of James.

He tried to be as careful as he could be, but he still heard James hiss a little as he got them a little deeper.

“All right?” Severus asked quietly.

“It stings,” James complained, his voice quiet too.

“That will be the stretch,” Severus replied gently. “Let me know if it gets to be too much.”

Severus pulled out and gathered more lube from the back of James’ thighs and where it had pooled behind his balls, before pressing back in.

James grunted his agreement into the blankets, but Severus could feel the tension in his back and shoulders when he ran his free hand over them. His own dick was full again and the urge to wrap a hand around himself was tempting, but he tried to stay focused on James.

Severus kept running his hands over James’ back and pressed both fingers deep, angling for James’ belly button like he had before.

“Ah!” James’ back arched and his head tilted back and up for a moment so that he could cry out. Severus had to fight back a grin at that gratifying reaction.

With that jolt of pleasure, James’ body loosened up for Severus quickly. The muscles in his back relaxed, his noises came louder and more readily, and the most pleasingly part was that James’ ass was quickly getting used to Severus’ added finger. It probably helped that Severus kept pushing the edges around James’ prostate. He didn’t want to make him come that way, but he did want to make sure that James kept on the edge of it so as to make stretching him out easier.

“Fuck, are you going to do this all night?” James asked, his words slurring a little.

“I want to get at least three fingers in you before I try,” Severus said quietly. He didn’t know why he didn’t snap at James like he usually did. Maybe it was because of the way his ass was opening for him so beautifully. “Do you think you can take another one?”

“Y-yeah, I think so?” James replied uncertainly, his voice lifting up at the end like a question.

Severus decided to take the answer for what it was.

Adding the third finger was harder than the second. He had been stretching James for a while, but adding the third finger still resulted in James tightening up again.

“Just breathe through it. Try to relax,” Severus advised, still only shallowly pushing in with three fingers.

He felt James’ chest expand and contract beneath his hand with three big deep breaths before he felt the tense muscle clenched around his fingers relax incrementally until Sev could finally slide his fingers in and out with relative ease.

“Sev,” James breathed. It was only his name, but to Severus it sounded like a plea.

“Okay,” Severus said under his breath, mostly to himself. “Okay, we can try. But, I’m stopping if there’s too much resistance.”

“Fuck, this is really happening,” James muttered, his voice a little high and strangled.

Severus had taken himself in hand and given himself a few strokes. He stopped at the sound of

James's voice, the fear apparent in his voice.

"We can still stop," Severus suggested. He expected the offer to gall him, but actually it didn't bother him that much. In fact, a small surge of relief rushed through him at the thought of stopping. "If you want, I can finger you 'til you come. I'm pretty sure it wouldn't take long. You seemed to really like that."

"No, I want to try," James replied, his voice sounding a lot stronger than it had previously. "But, ah, if it doesn't work so well, maybe we can do that instead?" James added after a moment.

Severus felt a moment of disappointment rush through him. The pressure of making this work, of making James like it, was starting to get to him. He didn't really want to fuck James and was afraid that it wouldn't work out, but he was too invested in it by then.

"Okay," Severus said quietly. He shifted himself over James, arranging his knees between James' knees and bracing one hand beside James' shoulder while he held himself steady at James' entrance with his other hand. "Remember to breathe and relax."

Without waiting for a reply, Severus began to push into James.

"Oh- ah!" James cried beneath him.

Despite Severus' warning, James did tighten up under the pressure. Severus grunted, pulling back.

"Potter," Severus said roughly. The tone was a warning, but he felt wary more than frustrated.

"Sorry," James muttered, sounding out of breath. "I'm okay. Try again," he said, pushing himself up onto his elbows.

Severus grimaced, but decided to just push forward and try again. He pressed his fingers briefly inside of James again. There was still plenty of lube and James opened easily to him this way. He held himself in hand again and pushed forward again.

James grunted and Severus watched his shoulders tighten up in the dim light under the blankets. Slowly, inexorably, Severus kept pushing and James' body continued to slowly give way. James' body was so warm, especially compared to the chill air that still managed to sneak in between the cracks in the charmed blankets. Besides the extreme warmth of his body, he was tight even though Severus could tell he was trying hard not to clench around him.

"Fuck, James," Severus sighed as he finally pushed past the tight ring of muscle enough that he could let go of himself. He wondered if he felt like this, when James would fuck him. The feeling was more than a little overwhelming.

"Ah! That's- It's-" James babbled, struggling and failing to put a sentence together. "A lot," he eventually said, which Severus very much identified with.

"I don't know if I can do this," Severus said around panting breaths.

"It's okay," James said, sounding just as overwhelmed and out of breath as Severus did. "We did it, so, um, whatever happens now is cool."

Severus had to frown at the back of James' head for a long minute before the words started to make sense. "You really don't care what we do, as long as I put my dick in your ass?" Severus asked, feeling and sounding confounded.

"Yeah, pretty much," James gasped out a laugh.

Severus glared in confusion at the back of James' head for a long moment. What did that mean? Did James really care that much about being fucked? Or, maybe he really disliked it now that it wasn't Severus' long dexterous fingers but instead his unyielding and significantly less talented dick. Maybe he should take it as a sign to back off quickly.

His legs were starting to shake from holding himself in a still position when James glanced over his shoulder at Severus. "Are you going to keep going?"

"Do you want me to?" Severus responded, knowing that he sounded lost.

Severus couldn't see James' expression very well in the dim light, but he looked frozen.

"It's okay if you want to stop," Severus said quietly.

James was quiet for a long moment. "Y-yeah," James eventually replied. "Yeah, stop," he said in a thick voice when Severus just held still.

Severus quickly scrambled off of James, that feeling of relief rushing over him in earnest. He was both relieved that he wouldn't have to go through with fucking James Potter and also a little disappointed that he didn't like it. Though, he knew, he didn't always like bottoming either. He tried to reassure himself that it wasn't necessarily him, thought it was hard not to think it. He hadn't expected to bring James to orgasm with his dick anyway, but it would have been nice.

"Does it hurt? Do you just want me to give you a handy?" Severus asked hesitantly, kneeling behind James.

"A little," James replied. "I really like, uh, your fingers though," James said hesitantly, slowly pushing himself up onto all fours. "I think I could probably come like that."

"Did you want me to do that?" Severus asked, encouraged.

"Could you?" James asked, sounding more hesitant and vulnerable than Severus was used to.

"Yeah, no problem," Severus agreed quickly, wrapping a hand around James' hip.

Severus pressed his fingers into James, still slick and open for him. James sighed happily after a few pumps of Severus' fingers and let his shoulders collapse down onto the floor, his ass still presented high in the air. Severus took notice that one of James' hands snaked down his body and between his legs to stroke his cock.

"Mmf! That's feels good," when Severus pressed in slow and hard on a particular downstroke.

Letting go of James' hip, Severus moved his hand to himself and started to stroke himself off in time with his thrusts into James' ass.

It felt like they had been at it for an eternity and Severus felt a particularly bad tightness in his lower stomach telling him he had probably been hard for too long. He started to press his fingers firmly against James' prostate with each push of his fingers, each pass wringing a pleased sound from James.

James didn't take long to spill into his own hand, after Severus had started to massage his prostate. Severus was somewhat surprised, his own orgasm still elusive despite the distracting cramps he felt in his lower belly.

James turned around slowly after catching his breath. He pressed his face against Severus' neck and knocked his hand away to start jerking Severus off himself. Severus gasped a little, the change of pressure and the feeling of James' callouses dragging against him enough to push him over the edge.

Severus spilled into James' hand, which was still sticky with his own release. A wrung out broken moan spilled from Severus' mouth as his stomach tightened up and the cramped feeling finally dispersed with his release.

Afterward they lay tangled up together, cocooned in the charmed blankets and breathing heavily from their mouths. The air trapped in the blankets smelled like sweat, musk and winter.

James wrapped an arm around Severus' waist and pulled him toward him until they were pressed together from shoulder to hip.

"That was great," James breathed.

Severus was struggling against the lax feeling in his own limbs, but stirred at that. "Do you mean it?"

"Yeah, your fingers should be illegal," James laughed. Severus could feel the grin pressed against his neck and his own lips stretched into a pleased smirk of their own.

Snorting with amusement, Severus burrowed his nose into James' unruly hair. They dozed for a while, the soft warmth of the blankets and the exhaustion in their own limbs catching up with them.

When Severus woke up, the faint light of morning was just beginning to stain the eastern edges of the sky. He and James were still wrapped around each other and bundled up in blankets that were no longer charmed into warmth, but still warmed by their combined body heat. Their skin was tacky with sweat and come and their hair was a knotted mess.

With a stab of regret, Severus realized that they would have to run for their dorms if they were going to sneak back into their beds before they had to get up and pretend they had never left. It had been their last time, but they hadn't managed to actually talk about anything. It ached like a broken rib in his chest. Severus wasn't sure the next time they would be able to get together like that. Without the bet to pull them together, what excuse would they come up with to meet?

"James, wake up," Severus croaked, his voice scratchy with sleep. "Wake up, we have to sneak back into our dorms," Severus said, pushing James's shoulder when he didn't stir.

"Whatever," James muttered against Severus' neck. His breath was warm and wet against his skin. "Let them catch us. I don't care."

"Yeah, I'm not doing that," Severus said flatly. "Come on. Get up!" Severus said, sitting up himself and exposing most of James' chest to the cold winter air when he dragged the blankets up with himself.

"Ah! Asshole!" James yelped, jerking forward to grab a blanket and pull it toward him.

Severus fished around in the pile of blankets until he found the dark colored pile that proved to be his bedraggled cloak and pants. He fumbled to pull his pants on without fully divesting himself

from the warmth of the blankets.

James sat up slightly to watch Severus with an unreadable expression. When Severus began to button up his white shirt, James finally spoke up.

“When will I see you again?” James asked with a serious expression.

“Probably at Potions later today,” Severus sneered.

“That’s not what I meant,” James snapped back.

“I know what you meant,” Severus sighed.

They were both quiet for a long moment before Severus finally spoke up again.

“This was the last time. Unless you have something to say, I guess we probably won’t meet like this again,” he said. It would be for the best, Severus thought. Unless something changed, Severus knew it would be a terrible idea to continue.

James frowned, staring at Severus in challenge for a while. When Severus stared back blankly, James eventually averted his eyes.

Severus looked away too and hoped that his expression didn’t look as dejected as he felt. He wasn’t sure why he felt that way. James was no good for him. He was sure of it. It was better this way.

“I don’t want to stop meeting,” James said after a while. He was still sitting nude in the pile of blankets, but Severus was almost fully dressed. He was stepping into his worn loafers, the beaten leather folding under his heel until he reached in with his index finger to pull it back up.

“Then, what do you want to do?” Severus asked, shrugging into his thin cloak.

“Why can’t we just keep meeting? The sex is good, right?” James asked, frowning.

Severus sighed and scratched at one cheek. “Do you like me?” he asked at length.

“No!” James said quickly, wrinkling his nose as if the mere thought disgusted him. “What about you? Do you like me?” he asked, his expression adjusting to one of cautious curiosity.

“Do you want to be my friend?” Severus asked, ignoring James’ question.

“Sure, that would be an easy one to explain to the lads,” James sneered.

Severus felt low, despite being so high above the grounds. The way his heart felt, he thought he should be at least 12 feet underground. James never pretended to like him and had made it clear he didn’t want to be seen with him publicly. But, he could be so tender when they were together, that Severus would inevitably forget what an asshole he was.

“You still haven’t answered my question,” James said after a moment. “Do you like me?” he asked, his face betraying no emotion even as his hands fidgeted nervously with the blankets that were bundled up around his waist.

Severus looked away from James and out over the rolling scottish countryside. It was beautiful in the dim light of morning.

“I don’t know,” he said quietly. “I’m not sure how I feel. But, I know that I don’t want to have sex with someone who doesn’t feel anything for me. At least,” he made a face, “not anymore. And,

I've heard enough from you to understand where you stand."

Severus was already dressed, so he saw no reason to stay any longer. He started toward the trap door set into the center of the tower.

"Hey, Snape! What- Stop, wait! I'm not done talking!" James exclaimed, standing quickly, but sitting back down when the cold air hit his lower body.

Severus pulled open the trap door and started to descend the steps while James continued to yell after him and struggled to find and put his clothes on quickly. He continued to walk down the stairs sedately and then out onto the school lawn while listening to James continue to struggle to come after him. He was halfway across the lawn when James finally burst out of the tower.

"What the fuck is wrong with you, Severus?" James screamed, probably waking half the castle with his big mouth.

Feeling his face warm with embarrassment and anger, Severus turned on his heel and screamed back, "Fuck you, Potter!" before turning around and quickly making his way toward the school.

"Asshole!" James screamed after him. "Coward! Cocksucker! Fuck you, you dark wizard motherfucker!" James screamed, his voice getting more caustic the longer he went on.

Severus hurried his steps until he was running full tilt toward the school. He didn't pause once he reached the door and tore into the corridor. He didn't stop to check corners or worry about running into anyone. He only slowed enough to cautious tiptoe back into his dorm room and sneak back into his bed.

His tears had mostly dried by the time that the first alarm bell rang.

## Epilogue

### *Years Later...*

Severus hesitated in the shadows outside of the Leaky Cauldron with a rough scrap of paper clutched in his hand. It was creased many times over by Severus' fidgeting hands, folding and unfolding the paper in his own nervousness.

That single scrap of paper that had floated into his room from a strange owl's claw had made him feel like he had been transported back to his days at Hogwarts. Receiving illicit notes from one's schoolboy crush could do that to you.

Sighing heavily, Severus leaned against the rough hewn brick wall that was nearest to him. The alley he was currently lingering in smelled like rotting food and piss. That usually would have been enough to hurry him along, but he found himself stuck in place.

*'Meet me in the attic room of the Cauldron at 7. -J.'*

That was all the note said. It was vague enough that nobody save himself was likely to guess correctly who 'J' was. So far as Severus knew, he and James' secret bet was still just that, a secret. He imagined if any of the other death eater's ever found out, he would have been pushed into trying to blackmail or manipulate James. If anyone ever found out on James' side, Severus assumed he would be ostracized to some greater or lesser extent.

"What am I doing here?" Severus muttered angrily to himself, smacking the back of his head against the brick wall behind him for added emphasis. A little burst of pain went off behind his eyes, but it did nothing to shake the intent to see James from his head.

Time and distance had aided Severus in seeing what happened between them at Hogwarts for what it was. For him, it started off as a chance to prove how bulletproof he was and could be. In the end, he was confused and somewhat heartsick for a boy who could only manage to be kind every once in a great while. He could only imagine what it was for James, but he assumed that it had started out as a mean stunt that had eventually been too much for his stunted little heart to handle without becoming emotionally attached.

Looking back, the whole thing had been a mess from start to finish. So, why was he going to meet the boy who had helped to create that mess with him? Most likely because was woefully self-destructive. Other facets of his life backed up that theory, so he saw no reason to deny it.

Stuffing the small scrap of paper back into his pocket, Severus flipped the hood of his cloak up over his head. The hood was large and cast his face in deep shadow. Somewhat confident that his identity was hidden, Severus wearily made his way out of the alley and around the corner to the Leaky Cauldron's front door.

Before he even got close, the sound of song and loud voices echoed out into the street. Severus tucked his tall lanky form behind a small group of drunken witches and followed them inside as inconspicuously as he could manage.

The inside of the Leaky Cauldron did everything to live up to the sound that could be heard from outside. Large groups of wizards and witches were gathered around small tables, pushing each other with their elbows and raising their overflowing mugs of ale for toasts. There was some kind of band set up near the roaring hearth. They were playing string instruments and singing, but they could barely be heard over the rumble of the crowd. Barmaids wove in between the inebriated crowd, delivering mugs full of ale and walking back to the bar with empty ones.

Severus kept to the edges of the room as much as he could and worked his way around until he could reach the narrow stairs that led upstairs. The Leaky Cauldron was primarily a pub, but there were also a few rooms upstairs where especially drunken patrons could sleep off the drink. Once he was up the stairs, the sound dimmed noticeably. Severus could still hear the thundering of many voices below, but the thick wooden floor dulled it considerably.

As quickly and quietly as possible, Severus slipped past the doors on the second floor until he reached another even smaller set of stairs on the far end of the hallway. He ascended these steps with the same care that he had used to creep through the hallway, though it seemed that every other step creaked. At the top of the steps was an old and battered door covered in dents and chipping paint that Severus hesitantly knocked on.

The door immediately flew open inward, a ruffled looking James Potter standing on the other side. He looked very similar to how he had in school. He was a little bit taller and his shoulders seemed wider. His hair was cut a little shorter and Severus thought that maybe he had new frames, small wire gold ones.

"Hi," James breathed, running a hand through his disordered black hair. He looked nervous and flushed.

Severus' mouth curled into a slight frown and he quickly put the hand down that had still been raised to knock. "Hello," Severus replied curtly.

"Ah, come in, come in," James said hurriedly, pulling the door open wider and stepping aside to let Severus pass him by.

Severus did so, stepping around James and pulling his hood down. He had to duck slightly as he stepped inside, because he was a bit too tall to stand comfortably in the peaked room set into the roof of the Leaky Cauldron. Severus had stayed at the Leaky Cauldron on occasion before, but never in this room.

It was large compared to the other rooms, but the varying height of the ceiling greatly restricted where in the room he could stand at his full height. Other than the ceiling, the room itself was very simple. There was a large low bed set into the middle of the room with white linens and light brown bedside tables. There was a trunk at the bottom of the bed and a small desk set against one wall, under one of two windows. The other window, on the opposite side of the room, held only a well used arm chair and a small foot stool.

That was the part of the room that James was standing in, only having to stoop a little to fit under the low ceiling.

"I didn't really think you'd come," James said hesitantly, ringing his hands for a moment until he seemed to notice himself doing it. He then stuffed his hands into his pockets.

Severus sighed, a little put out that James was acting so meek. "Neither did I, yet here I am."

"That you are," James agreed awkwardly, walking forward until he could take a seat on the edge of the bed. He patted the spot right beside him to indicate that Severus should take a seat beside him. Severus' frown deepened and, rather than taking James' proffered seat on the bed, he perched on the edge of the over stuffed armchair that faced it.

A brief look of hurt flashed across James' face, but he quickly smothered it. Stiffly putting his hands in his lap, James glanced away as he said, "You're probably wondering why I asked you here."

"Primarily, yes," Severus responded. "How you knew where to find me is also something I'd like to know."

A roguish grin spread over James' face, sending Severus back into his school days in a flash. "Ha," James laughed shortly. "Trade secret."

Severus huffed out a frustrated sound. "Of course," he replied.

James' self satisfied grin simmered down into a more chastised one at Severus' less than enthusiastic reaction. "I assume you still work for," James coughed into his fist briefly, though in such an affected way that Severus was sure that it was just an excuse to stall for time. "... for you-know-who," he finished.

Severus glanced away for a moment. It wasn't as if he didn't think it would come up, but it wasn't a subject he was exceedingly comfortable with.

"Yes," he answered shortly, deciding to stay succinct.

James frowned earnestly at that reply and gave Severus a searching look. Severus sat still and surly under James' searching gaze.

"Still loyal? No doubts?" James asked hopefully.

It was framed as a joke, but the underlying tone of hope and desperation under it belied how genuine it was. Severus didn't understand why he would even bother to ask and so couldn't help snapping.

"That's none of your business," Severus growled, showing a little teeth in a childish display of aggression he would have thought himself better than.

"You know you're better than the rest of them," James said, his eyes flashing. Severus imagined that was the same look he got when he smelled a lead.

Severus snorted. That was certainly rich, coming from James fucking Potter. "Yes, you certainly made me feel that way in school," Severus replied sarcastically.

James grimaced as if he was just struck. "I was a real shit in school. But, I don't think anybody is at their best as a teenager."

"I'll toast to the shit part," Severus said wryly, causing James to grimace again. Severus understood that everyone made mistakes when they were teenagers. He certainly had made his fair share. But, he thought what James had done to him was quite a bit farther than just a mistake.

"I may not have said it back then, but I always thought you were better than the other stuck up kids

in your house," James continued on, trying to ignore the jab. "I still think it. If you're having doubts and you need some place to hide out while you sort things out, I can help," James said urgently, sitting forward until he was just on the edge of the bed.

He looked desperate. Severus wasn't charitable enough to James or himself to think that expression was for him alone. Perhaps James felt somewhat responsible for pushing him toward the dark lord. It wasn't as if he was a pureblood himself, but James and his friends had made it very clear he wasn't welcome on their side. That didn't leave him many options.

Severus also didn't much relish the decision that he had made fresh out of Hogwarts to join the Deatheaters. At the time it had seemed like the obvious thing to do. Looking back, he wished he had done something else. Even so, he felt he was in far too deep to try and escape then.

"Thank you for the offer," Severus replied as neutrally as he could. "I'll keep it in mind."

James' whole body seemed to sink in on itself with Severus' rejection. James turned his head down and stared intently at the space between his feet while Severus did his best not to fidget. He wondered vaguely if this was the only reason James had called him there. If it was some attempt to redeem himself by helping Severus, he would be very disappointed.

The two sat in silence for a long time and Severus was getting ready to suggest that he might leave when James finally spoke up.

"I've been thinking about the past a lot," he said faintly, still staring at the scratched and worn floorboards beneath his feet.

"Hm?" Severus replied faintly.

"Back then, I know..."

Severus raised an eyebrow at James' faltering words, but decided to remain silent and let him work out what he wanted to say on his own.

"Back then, I know I treated you very badly," James tried again. "Both with the bullying and with, ah," James faltered again, glancing up at Severus this time as if for help, but Severus only stared expectantly back. "With the, ah, fooling around we did."

"I guess fooling around is one way to describe it," Severus muttered.

"I wasn't kind to you any step of the way," James said.

Severus grimaced. "You had your moments when you could be sweet. Though it was rare," he added in wry voice.

James flashed a quick smile and hurried on. "I guess it was because I always thought you were so tough. And, also, I guess, to some extent I didn't really care if I hurt you."

Severus had to glance away at that to try and hide what he felt was probably a raw expression, but James hurried on.

"But, that changed! Not fast enough, maybe, but I did care for you. That night on the tower..."

James faltered again and this time Severus did prompt him. "What about that night?"

"That night ... I wish I had given you a different answer," James answered, his voice croaking

slightly with emotion.

Severus had to look away again, tears misting up despite his best effort to prevent them.

"You didn't, though," Severus replied, mortified that his voice also sounded ragged when he spoke. He cleared his throat and kept speaking. "No amount of second guessing will change that."

"I know!" James said, sounding downtrodden, but resolute. "I was just a kid and I didn't really understand what I felt. What I feel."

Severus eyes flashed at that, but he didn't say anything. *'It was a slip up,'* he thought fiercely, both for himself and for Lily. He didn't want to think about what he thought James might be angling at.

"Is this what you called me here for, Potter?" Severus asked fiercely.

"I-" James started, his eyebrows drawn together angrily. But, the anger quickly fizzled out and he dropped his head despondently. "I don't know. I don't really know why I called you here."

"I risked a lot coming here to meet you," Severus snarled, already angry at James and getting angrier with every stupid word that left his mouth. "If anybody knew that I was coming here to meet you, that would be the end for me. I would be labeled a traitor and hunted until dead!"

"I know!" James shouted, sounding frazzled. A hand reached up into his hair and he pulled at one large chunk. "I know how dangerous it was for you to come here. And, maybe I shouldn't have asked you, but I couldn't help myself!"

Severus' nose wrinkled in distaste. This wasn't like the James Potter that he knew. He never knew him to be so uncertain, though the impulsive part was definitely in his repertoire.

"James, calm down. Just be straight with me. What is bothering you?" Severus asked in a quiet tone.

James blanched and looked away, rubbing his hand roughly over his head as he appeared to cast around for something to say. Finally, he heaved a sigh and seemed to resign himself to the truth.

"Lily is pregnant," he said in a defeated voice.

Severus felt a shock rush through his system at the news. On one hand, he found himself happy for Lily, despite not having spoken to her for years. On the other hand, that really didn't answer why James had called him. He assumed that a baby was a cause for celebration for a young couple.

"Congratulations are in order, I suppose," he muttered, allowing himself to fidget in his seat.

James' head snapped up and he glared at Severus like he had insulted his mother. "You don't understand," James accused, standing up and pacing in agitation.

Severus followed him with his eyes. "Obviously," he said in a deadpan voice. "So, enlighten me."

James paced for a few more repetitions before he finally burst out, "What if I'm a terrible father?"

Honestly, the thought somewhat tickled Severus. He could only assume that James would be the kind of oppressive father that he sometimes heard his Slytherin classmates complain about. Great at everything and expecting the same unequivocally of his children. Severus did his best to muffle his laugh, but it snuck out the corners of his mouth and out from behind his hand.

"See?" James exclaimed, turning toward Severus. "You understand! Everyone else I talk to just

tells me that everyone feels that way, everything will be fine old chap, blah blah blah!" James threw his hands up into the air, or tried to anyway, and hit his hand on the ceiling instead.

"Shit!" he exclaimed, pulling his hand back and cradling it to his chest. This induced a hearty laugh that Severus couldn't subdue in time. "It's not funny!" James shouted, whirling on Severus with an infuriated expression. Obviously the pain and the laughing were only making his anxiety worse.

Severus made a calming gesture with his hands as he fought to get himself under control. After he did so, he took a deep breath and formulated a response that he hoped would be suitably reassuring. He wasn't sure why he wanted to calm James, but did so on impulse.

"I find it hard to believe that you're going to fail at being a father. I haven't seen anything attempt anything and wholesale fail at it. It was part of why you were so popular in school," Severus said. "What's the real reason you're upset and turning to me of all people for answers?"

James ran a hand roughly over his face and paced a few more times before he took a heavy seat back on the edge of the bed.

"It's just that," James faltered again, waving his hand as if he could pluck the words he was looking for out of the air. "I thought I had more time."

"Time for what?" Severus asked, confused. He didn't think he was at all ready to be a father either, but the chances of him becoming one were next to non-existent. How does one one marry a woman and not realize these chances may rise somewhat significantly?

"I don't know!" James breathed out heavily. "More time to run around with the lads. More time to do reckless things. More time to stay late at work and take the jobs no one else wants. More time to fix things up with you," James looked up at Severus with an intense look and Severus struggled not to avert his eyes. "Not even just with you. There are a lot of burnt bridges behind me that I always had intentions of fixing."

Severus sighed and allowed himself to glance at the peaked ceiling. He thought to himself that James was definitely being a drama queen, which is perhaps why he couldn't express this to his 'lads'.

"You can still do many of those things," Severus said. "I suppose many of them would preclude you from being considered a 'good' father, but you would still be a father. Nobody's perfect James."

James frowned, but tried to cover it up with a smile that looked more like a grimace. "Does that mean we can still patch things up?"

"I said many. Patching things up with me was not included."

Severus stood up and moved to gather his things, but realized there was nothing to gather. He had pushed the hood of his cloak down, but had otherwise brought nothing but his wand with him. Hesitantly, he reached up and pulled his hood back over his head.

"You came when I called, though," James said to Severus. Severus was already turned toward the door, but he paused at James' words. It was true. It was foolish of him, but he did it anyway. A statement that could be applied to most of his decisions in relation to James.

"I won't come next time," Severus said, both a warning to James and a promise to himself.

"I really do regret it," James said. His voice sounded tortured and Severus very much wanted to

turn around and judge for himself how true that statement was, but he couldn't allow himself to do so. If he did, he was worried his strength of will might falter.

"As do I," he said gravely, before stepping through the rough hewn door and down to the uneven steps below, pulling the door shut behind him. He stopped for a moment on the top step, but there was no sound from the room behind him. Just the faint sounds of the unruly bar on the bottom floor.

Severus didn't know when he and James would meet again and it scared him, he realized as he walked down the steps and turned a corner into the second floor hall. He didn't know if they would next meet on a battlefield or in a court. If they would pass each other on the street or see each other across a crowded room.

Or, perhaps, they would never see each other again.

Firmly, he told himself it didn't matter. It didn't do to dwell on what ifs and maybes. James had made his decision, regardless of how he felt about it later. Severus had done the same.

Severus hugged the walls of the slightly more subdued bar below until he could slip out the door unnoticed. As he did so, he realized that James' proposed meeting was most likely an attempt to possibly rekindle what started back in school. The offers to help him transition sides, the heartfelt apologies both made Severus' heart pound and his head spin.

Regardless of all the history James and he had together, regardless of how Lily felt about him, she was still the best friend he had ever had. It was his fault he had messed it up, not hers. He could never betray her like that. He never should have slept with James, even when they were just dating and there was nothing romantic about the sex.

Once he was far enough away, Severus apparated back to his home with a sharp twist. He ended up in the foyer of his childhood home.

It was empty now, his mother had died a few years ago. Without her presence, the house felt indelibly cold and empty. It was dark and raining, the water coming down heavy outside and making the inside of the house feel damp.

Severus lit a fire in the hearth and settled into a chair by the fire. He opened a book, but gave it up as a bad job after a few minutes. He couldn't focus, not after the encounter with James. His mind just kept going in circles, questioning whether or not he had done the right thing.

Eventually he fell asleep in the chair, never coming to any consensus on what he should have done different.

Months later, James and Lily Potter were dead leaving only their infant son behind.

Severus would always question if he had done the right thing that night. He possibly never forgave James for settling that kind of regret on his shoulders in the first place.

**James promises Severus that if  
Severus has sex with him 93  
times, he will break up with Lilly  
and advocate that she date  
Severus.**

